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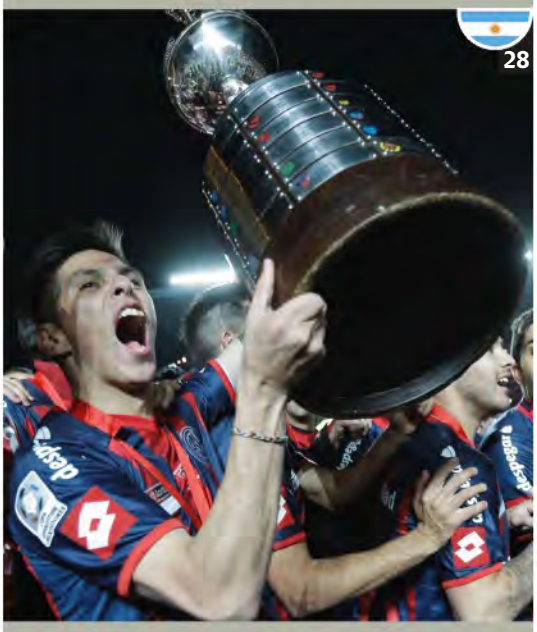

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92 Internationals
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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

SPAIN...Real Madrid's Sergio Ramos heads towards goal despite pressure from the Real Sociedad defence

GERMANY...Borussia Dortmund's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang wears a Spiderman mask to celebrate scoring against Bayern Munich in the German Super Cup

VATICAN CITY...San Lorenzo fan Pope Francis grants an audience to the Libertadores Cup winners

MEXICO...Atlas goalkeeper Federico Vilar celebrates a goal against Santos

WALES...Ashley Williams flinches as Burnley's Ross Wallace strikes a free-kick into the Swansea City defensive wall

ITALY...Roma's Radja Nainggolan (left) celebrates with Gervinho after a goal against Fiorentina

EGYPT...Kaddour Beldjilali of Etoile du Sahel kisses Hossam Ashour of Al Ahly during their CAF Confederation Cup match

PICTURES OF THE MONTH QR CODE

To see more of the best photos from the month, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the images by logging on to http://po.st/iFDSk2

FROM THE EDITOR

Let's face it, international football needs all the friends it can get. The World Cup in Brazil provided a reminder of the global appeal that tournament football can generate, but the return this month of the Champions League (page 40) will again turn the spotlight back on the club game.

Europe's elite clubs have spent vast sums this summer on players who will dominate our TV screens for the duration of the season. It remains to be seen whether UEFA's changes to the European Championship (page 18) will do anything to redress the balance between club and country.

> Europe's elite have spent vast sums this summer on players who will dominate our TV screens for the duration of the season

Expansion of the Euro finals to 24 teams may ultimately damage the quality of the competition, with increased numbers of dead-rubber games. But the change could also have the perverse effect of making the qualifying campaign more exciting, with more countries in contention for a place in France in two years time.

We've expanded our Champions League guide – also available in digital format (right) for iPad and other tablets – to include more player profiles. As ever, please let us know your thoughts.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

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9 Lahm, Mertesacker and Ribery retire from internationals ..... page 20
10 New A-League season ..... page 32

UEFA's number one...Ronaldo was named the best player in Europe

MONACO

Ronaldo wins UEFA Best Player prize

Cristiano Ronaldo beat Manuel Neuer and Arjen Robben to be named as UEFA's Best Player in Europe for 2014. The Real Madrid forward received the accolade from UEFA president Michel Platini after winning the vote by a Europe-wide panel of journalists.

Ronaldo received 26 of the 54 votes cast, ahead of 19 for Neuer and nine for Robben. He reacted to the announcement of his victory in Monaco by pumping his fists in celebration.

Ronaldo's victory was a recognition of his contribution to Real Madrid's 10th European victory, in May. The Portuguese star scored a record 17 goals during the campaign.

Ronaldo, Neuer and Robben were selected for the three-man shortlist from a 10-strong long list that included Thomas Muller (Bayern Munich & Germany), Philipp Lahm (Bayern Munich & Germany), Lionel Messi (Barcelona & Argentina), James Rodriguez (Monaco/Real Madrid & Colombia), Luis Suarez (Liverpool/Barcelona & Uruguay), Angel Di Maria (Real Madrid/Manchester United & Argentina) and Diego Costa (Atletico Madrid/Chelsea & Spain)

What a difference a year makes. Last year Ronaldo refused to travel to Monaco for the award which was won, as many had expected, by Franck Ribery of Bayern Munich, with Messi in second place.

This year, the tables were turned.

"I was shocked. The call came as a complete surprise"

Martin Odegaard on being picked for Norway's friendly against the UAE and, at 15 years and 253 days, becoming his country's youngest-ever international

FIFA

Platini rules out challenge to Blatter

UEFA president Michel Platini will not challenge Sepp Blatter for the FIFA presidency next year. Instead, he will concentrate on seeking another term as head of the European federation.

Platini has become increasingly critical of Blatter's tenure at FIFA, but has decided

against challenging Blatter's bid for a fifth term in office.

"This is not the time; it is not my time. Not yet," said Platini. "I thought long and hard, but never managed to convince myself during these months of reflection that I had to go to FIFA for these elections. It's as simple as that.

"Once again, I have chosen to follow my heart. I have chosen football. I have chosen passion."

So far, former FIFA general-secretary Jerome Champagne is the only person to have announced an intention to challenge Blatter at the election, which is scheduled for May.

No challenge...Platini (left) and Blatter

HEROES & VILLAINS

YACINE BAMMOU

The Nantes forward came off the bench against Lens for his Ligue 1 debut and scored the only goal of the game 32 seconds later. A year earlier, he had been working in the Paris Saint-Germain club shop.

Quick start...Bammou

MARK OXLEY

Making his debut in goal for Hibernian, the goalkeeper scored against Livingston with a clearance in the Scottish second tier.

COSMIN MOTI

The Ludogorets defender went between the posts after his side's goalkeeper was sent-off and he saved two penalties against Steaua Bucharest in a shoot-out to send the Bulgarian side into the Champions League group stage.

TYRONE MINGS

After Ipswich Town's squad numbers for this season were announced, the 21-year-old defender offered to buy new shirts for supporters who had already bought kits with his old number on the back.

No1...Mings offered to purchase replacement shirts

VEGARD FORREN

The Molde defender missed an 87th-minute penalty and then scored an own goal two minutes later as the Norwegian club lost 3-2 on aggregate to Zorya Luhansk of Ukraine in the Europa League.

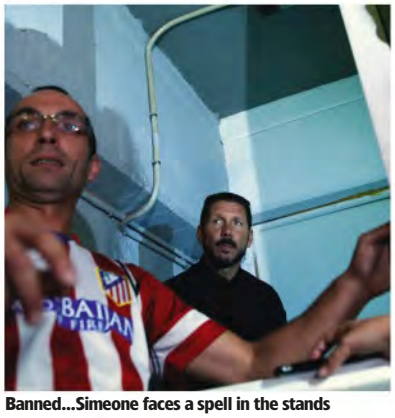
Trouble...Brandao lost his temper after the PSG game

BRANDAO

Bastia's Brazilian striker waited for Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Thiago Motta in the tunnel after their Ligue 1 game and broke his nose with a head-butt.

PETROS

Corinthians' on-loan midfielder was suspended for six months after shoving a referee from behind during his team's 1-0 win against Santos.



Banned...Simeone faces a spell in the stands

DIEGO SIMEONE

The Atletico Madrid coach was banned for eight matches after confronting a official on the touchline.

"There must not be any bloodletting here"

Following San Lorenzo's first Libertadores title, coach Edgardo Bauza warns against an extensive sale of talent

GOALS we'd like to see again

To see video footage of these goals, and many more that we have selected, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the videos by logging on to http://po.st/XEnL1t

1 GERMANO
Coritiba v Fluminense
Controls the ball with the inside of his boot before a left-footed volley into the corner.

2 FABIAN KLOS
Arminia Bielefeld v Sandhausen
Volleys home following a corner with perfect technique from the edge of the penalty area.

3 EDINSON CAVANI
Paris Saint-Germain v Brest
Controls a long pass, before adjusting position and volleying into the bottom corner.

4 MARC BURCH
Colorado Rapids v LA Galaxy
A howitzer of a free-kick that crashes in off the underside of the crossbar.

5 PEDRO VELASCO
Barcelona v Alianza Lima
Runs from just inside the opposing half before scoring for the Ecuadorian side with a low shot past the Peruvian club's goalkeeper.

6 KARIM BELLARABI
Bayer Leverkusen v Borussia Dortmund
Puts the finishing touch to a rapid move straight from the kick-off by cutting inside his marker to score the fastest-ever goal in Bundesliga history.

WINNERS

SAN LORENZO
Were crowned Libertadores Cup winners for the first time with a 2-1 aggregate victory against Nacional of Paraguay.

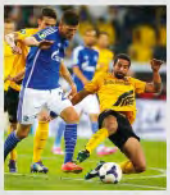
ZENIT
Equalled the Russian Premier League's biggest ever win when they beat Torpedo Moscow 8-1.

REAL MADRID
Victory in the UEFA Super Cup saw them equal Milan's record of 14 European trophies.

ESPERANCE
The Tunisian club, twice winners of the CAF Champions League, crashed out in the second round group stage of this year's competition.

MANCHESTER UNITED
Lost an opening home league game in the top flight for the first time in 42 years as Swansea City beat them 2-1 at Old Trafford.

SCHALKE
The Bundesliga side were put out of the German Cup in the first round by third-tier club Dynamo Dresden, who had been banned from last year's competition.



LOSERS

ALGERIA

League suspended after player's death

Equaliser...Ebosse scores from the penalty spot against USM Alger

The Algerian league programme was suspended following the death of Albert Ebosse, the Cameroon striker who was killed by a missile thrown from the stands during a game between his side, JS Kabylie, and USM Alger in Tizi Ouzou, east of the capital Algiers.

Ebosse was fatally hit following JS Kabylie's 2-1 defeat. Fans pelted the pitch with missiles as the players returned to their changing rooms.

The 24-year-old, who was his side's top scorer last season, was pronounced dead after he was rushed to hospital. Autopsy results revealed he had died after being struck on the head by a "heavy blunt object that caused a haemorrhage".

Police have opened an investigation into the incident while the Algerian football federation said it was planning further action, including the expulsion of the club at fault "from all competitions".

FIFA president Sepp Blatter said: "Intolerable that a fan causes a player's death. Stop the violence. My emotional thoughts go to Albert Ebosse's family. RIP."

Invasion...a fan gets on the pitch

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

The World Cup is the last place to go for tactical innovations

Here we have the official FIFA Technical Report for World Cup 2014. Problem: these reports (and I've read dozens of them) are never very technical. They tend to read like – and, with their dazzling display of colour action pictures, to look like – publicity brochures for the tournaments.

The general tone is to see only the positive side. A clue to that mentality, and to the overall vapidity of the opinions, can be found in the composition of the people who produce the report. The Technical Study Group (TSG) is an ad hoc panel, reconstituted for each World Cup. The 2014 version has 13 members with all six FIFA Confederations represented. Europe (as ever) has most places (four), South America has but one, while CONCACAF, inexplicably, has three.

Evidently, FIFA politics plays a role in the selection of panel members. Over half of them do not seem, to me, to have any outstanding qualifications for the task.

This group, then, has produced an ebullient report that praises just about everything that happened in Brazil. Its very first words set out that view: "Hosts Brazil started strongly with a 3-1 win over Croatia..."

Hmmm... it seemed to me that most observers felt that Brazil looked shaky and needed substantial refereeing help to win this one, benefitting from a very iffy penalty kick and the official's failure to eject Neymar with a second caution. But, the referees were great, the report says so. I should mention, the referee part of the report was written by Massimo Busacca, the man responsible for their training.

The tournament was judged to be "outstanding" - an exaggeration, I think, but there was certainly much that was encouraging, particularly the emphasis on attacking play. Well, why did that happen? But Technical Reports do not ask why.

Instead they offer what are frequently fatuous comments - such as: "The overriding tactic was to use the players in the position in which they could give their best for the team", or "Successful teams tended to have a number of excellent substitutes on the bench".

If not downright fatuous, then it was either obvious "Teamwork was essential" or simply old-hat "When defenders go forward, they need to be covered by midfielders or wingers who take up their positions" (advice that can be found in Hugo Meisl's 1955 book *Soccer Revolution*). There is also a good deal of tripe about a "New Era of Goalkeeping."

I am in total agreement with the Report's delight at the "enjoyable football" produced by the devotion to attacking play, but am troubled by the banality of the "technical and tactical" reasoning contained in the Report. The shoddy thinking produces at least one massive contradiction. Amid all the pro-attacking hype, the Report has this to say: "Without mistakes there can be no goals." Apparently, attacking skills – praised repeatedly in the Report – are not enough.

> National coaches do not invent new systems...they are made at club level, where they can be refined or rejected during a season

It is a shame that the Report's platitudes mean that it is overshadowed by the dry facts of the Statistics section. But it is interesting to see that only three goals were scored from direct free-kicks, that the goals scored from corner kicks (10 in South Africa in 2010) had risen to 18 – but could we know the number of corner kicks, please?

Perhaps the oddest thing is that we should expect anything revealing or new at a World Cup. National-team coaches do not invent new systems and then hide them until the next World Cup finals. Tactical developments and advances, if that's what they are, are made at the club level, where they can be refined or rejected during entire seasons.

So maybe the TSG can be forgiven for not offering coherent explanations of developments. The reasons for the changes lie not in the World Cup, but in the world of club football. WS

"Clubs paid on average 16 per cent more than they invested in the five previous years for players with similar characteristics"

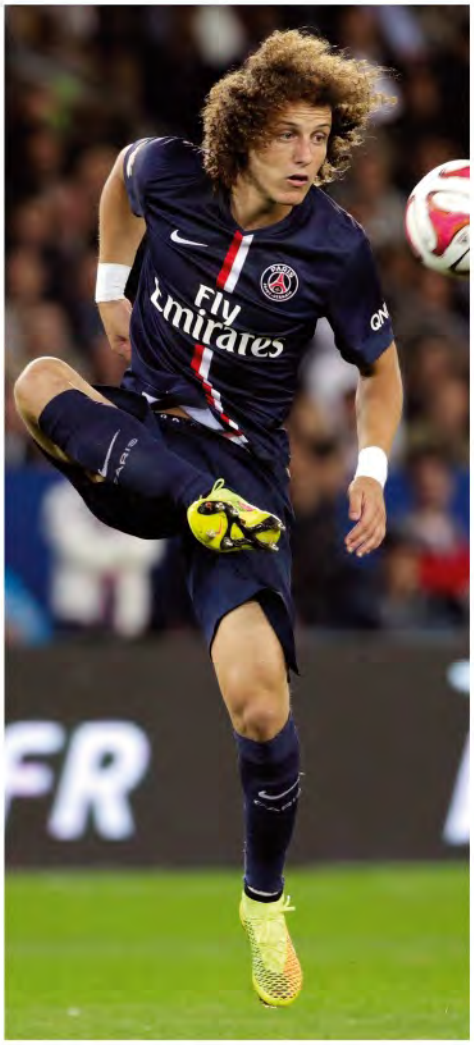
Swiss-based CIES Football Observatory used data from 1500 transfers to demonstrate how Europe's top clubs overpaid for players this summer.

TRANSFERS

United transfer spending tops £150m

Manchester United were the biggest spenders in the summer transfer market, splashing out a record £150.1m on new players, including record signing Angel Di Maria from Real Madrid and a one-year loan deal for Colombia striker Radamel Falcao from Monaco. United paid £59.7m for Di Maria, a £6m loan fee for Falcao, £27m for Luke Shaw, £28m for Ander Herrera, £16m for Marcos Rojo and £14m for Daley Blind.

United's spending spree represented the biggest outlay by an English club in the transfer window, eclipsing Manchester City's reported £148m in 2009 and Chelsea's £111m in 2003, when billionaire owner Roman Abramovich arrived at the club. Earlier this year, United announced a record 10-year kit deal with adidas, worth a reported £750m.



Point to prove...PSG's Luiz had his critics at the World Cup

BIGGEST TRANSFER DEALS OF SUMMER 2014

Flying start...Costa scored on his Premier League debut for Chelsea, at home to promoted Leicester City

Camp Nou new boy...Suarez

Serie A starlet...Iturbe

Luis Suarez Liverpool to Barcelona, £75m
James Rodriguez Monaco to Real Madrid, £71.0m
Angel Di Maria Real Madrid to Manchester United, £59.7m
David Luiz Chelsea to Paris Saint-Germain, £40m
Alexis Sanchez Barcelona to Arsenal, £35m
Diego Costa Atletico Madrid to Chelsea, £32m
Eliaquim Mangala Porto to Manchester City, £32m
Cesc Fabregas Barcelona to Chelsea, £30m
Ander Herrera Athletic Bilbao to Manchester United, £29m
Romelu Lukaku Chelsea to Everton, £28m
Luke Shaw Southampton to Manchester United, £27m
Adam Lallana Southampton to Liverpool, £25m
Toni Kroos Bayern Munich to Real Madrid, £25m
Lazar Markovic Benfica to Liverpool, £20m
Filipe Luis Atletico Madrid to Chelsea, £20m
Dejan Lovren Southampton to Liverpool, £20m
Juan Iturbe Porto to Roma, £17.4m
Marcos Rojo Sporting Lisbon to Manchester United, £16m
Mario Balotelli Milan to Liverpool to £16m
Danny Welbeck Manchester United to Arsenal, £16m

● *For all the summer's transfers go to http://www.worldsoccer.com/features/transfers*

OBITUARIES

Yugoslavia hero...Beara

VLADIMIR BEARA (1928-2014)
An Olympic silver medalist with Yugoslavia in 1952, the goalkeeper also played at the 1954 and 1958 World Cups, making a total of 59 appearances for the national team. He later coached club sides in Germany, Holland, Austria and Yugoslavia, as well as the Cameroon national team.

ANDRIY BAL (1958-2014)
Capped 20 times by the Soviet Union, the former Dynamo Kiev midfielder won four Soviet league titles and the 1986 European Cup-winners' Cup. He played at the World Cup finals of 1982 and 1986 and also won the 1976 European Under-19 tournament, the 1980 European Under-21 Championship and captained the USSR to Under-20 World Cup glory in 1977. He died of a heart attack, which he suffered while playing in a seniors' match.

Club and country honours...Bal (left)

CARLOS ARANGO (1928-2014)
The former Colombia striker, known as "*El Maestro*", scored the first goal for his country in the World Cup qualifiers in October 1957. Throughout his career he scored 178 goals. He won the Central American and Caribbean Games in 1946.

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

UEFA doesn't have a Legia to stand on after Polish blunder

We all know that football needs to be policed more than most other sports. The world's favourite game is shot through with cheating – the endless feigning of injury by players, diving in the box to win unjust match-winning penalties or the incessant tactical fouling in midfield and at corners.

The crimes must also be met with fair punishment – and too often they are not.

A clear example of crass injustice was the expulsion of Legia Warsaw from the Champions League after they had thrashed Celtic 6-1 in a third-round qualifying tie.

The Polish club were booted out because, due to a minor and inconsequential administrative error, they had fielded the ineligible Bartosz Bereszynski for the final two minutes of the second leg.

The decision by UEFA's intransigent disciplinary committee offended against natural justice; a deeply unfair and excessive sanction that should have been withdrawn and the relevant section of the UEFA rulebook redrafted.

> UEFA's decision was deeply unfair and offended against natural justice

Appeals by Legia were summarily rejected. The club felt its case was so strong it even made a direct plea to the honour of Celtic, former champions of Europe, not to take up the place in the next round.

It had no chance of succeeding, of course, in a sport where every club in Celtic's situation would hide behind a ridiculous rulebook and chase the riches on offer for further progress in the modern Champions League. Embarrassment? Not likely.

UEFA should understand it didn't have to be that way. They could allow themselves some leeway on sanctions so that a minor case like Legia's receives an appropriate punishment and matches are settled where they ought to be – on the field.

In England last season Sunderland played four Premier League matches with Ji Dong-won in the side although he was technically ineligible because the relevant international clearance papers were not fully in order. Another administrative error but sensibly punished with a heavy fine rather than deduction of points.

Another case that dragged through the legal process all the way to the Court of Arbitration in Sport was Luis Suarez's four-month ban from all football activity, including training with his club, for his infamous bite on Giorgio Chiellini's shoulder at the World Cup.

How fair was this? CAS upheld the ban for competitive matches but allowed the Uruguayan back into training and friendlies with his new club Barcelona. Suarez's conduct was shocking and required action. Yet was it worse than the reckless and dangerous flying tackles in matches that leave players with a broken leg, yet sees the culprit banned for just three games?

I feel football has always been far too soft on career-threatening assaults during games, whether or not a victim is seriously injured in the incident. Just as it is too lenient on the kind of tactical fouling which scarred the Brazil v Colombia quarter-final at the World Cup and eventually resulted in Neymar leaving the tournament in agony on a stretcher.

From the gratuitous hacking of Pele in 1966, to Harald Schumacher's brutal lunge at Patrick Battiston in 1982, to the horrors of the 2010 Final – will they ever learn?

Football must find a way to get the right balance. An area it clearly struggles with is the appropriate response to racism among players, crowds and comments by officials and managers.

UEFA are investigating the new Italian FA president Carlo Tavecchio for an allegedly racist comment about "banana-eaters" made during his campaign, while in England the FA are considering a number of offensive text messages revealed to have been sent by former Cardiff City manager Malky Mackay.

If sanctions are required, what should they be? The former FA chairman Lord Triesman said Mackay should be suspended for 12 months if found guilty. That will seem excessive to many – but does football need draconian punishments on this issue to change its culture of complacency? WS

"It would great if, just for once, Karl-Heinz Rummenigge kept his mouth shut"

Borussia Dortmund director of sport Michael Zorc lashes out at the Bayern Munich chairman (left) for unsettling star forward Marco Reus with talk of his release clause

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

Loan deal... Ghoochannejhad

EUROPE

ANTONIO CONTE, who won three successive Serie A titles in charge of Juventus, succeeded Cesare Prandelli as coach of Italy.

Assistant **ISMAIL KARTAL** replaced Ersun Yanal as coach of Turkish champions Fenerbahce.

NEIL WARNOCK returned to manage Crystal Palace after Tony Pulis quit the Premier League side.

ALEX McLEISH, who left Nottingham Forest in 2013, was named coach of Belgian side Genk.

DRAGAN RADOJICIC, who led Sutjeska to successive Montenegrin titles, left a week before the start of the season to join rivals Buducnost.

PAT FENLON, who won five League of Ireland titles with Shelbourne and Bohemians but failed in Scotland with Hibernian, replaced Trevor Croly as manager of Shamrock Rovers.

SOUTH AMERICA

Brazil winger **ROBINHO** returned to Santos for a third spell, joining on a season-long loan from Milan.

Third time...Robinho is back at Santos

JOSE PEKERMAN will stay on as coach of Colombia for the 2018 World Cup qualifiers and the next two Copa America tournaments after agreeing a new four-year deal.

CONCACAF

Guatemala's record marksman **CARLOS RUIZ**, who scored 55 goals and won 104 caps, came out of international retirement. The 34-year-old joined local side Municipal from DC United in March and became the highest-paid footballer ever in Central America.

AFRICA

HONOUR JANZA replaced Patrice Beaumelle as coach of Zambia's national team.

ASIA

Iran's World Cup striker **REZA GHOOCHANNEJHAD** joined last year's AFC Cup champions Kuwait SC on a season-long loan deal from English side Charlton Athletic.

Saudi Arabian team Al Shabab appointed a new coach in **JOSE MORAIS**, who has taken a one-year sabbatical as an assistant to Jose Mourinho at Chelsea.

Bahrain and Jordan appointed new coaches **ADNAN HAMAD** and **AHMED ABU ISMAIL** respectively.

OCEANIA

ANTHONY HUDSON resigned as coach of Bahrain's national team to take charge of New Zealand.

OUT

EUROPE

OSCAR GARCIA quit his job at Maccabi Tel Aviv with the club claiming the Spanish coach's decision was due to the current "security situation" in Israel.

Belgian defender **DANIEL VAN BUYTEN**, without a club since his contract with Bayern Munich expired in June, retired from the game at the age of 36.

CONCACAF

Los Angeles Galaxy's 32-year-old attacking midfielder **LANDON DONOVAN**, who has scored a record 57 goals for the USA, will hang up his boots at the end of the current MLS season.

Retiring...Donovan

AFRICA

Chelsea striker **DIDIER DROGBA**, 36, announced his retirement from international football after scoring a national record 65 goals in 104 games for the Ivory Coast.

Mauritania's **PATRICE NEVEU**, **ADEL AMROUCHE** of Kenya and Zimbabwe coach **IAN GOROWA** all left their positions after failure to reach the group stage of the African Nations Cup qualifiers.

Sagan Tosu parted company with their coach **YOON JUNG-HWAN** despite being top of the J.League.

New men in charge...Martino (left) and Segura

Martino takes charge of Argentina

Former Barcelona coach **GERARDO MARTINO** replaced Alejandro Sabella as boss of Argentina. **LUIS SEGURA** left his post as chairman of Argentinos Juniors to become president of the FA following the death of Julio Grondona.

Third time unlucky...Carlos Bianchi

Bianchi sacked by Boca Juniors

CARLOS BIANCHI, the most successful coach in the history of Boca Juniors, was fired after losing three out of his first four games of the season.

Bianchi, 65, was in his third spell at the club, having signed a deal 18 months ago.

In his first period in charge, in the late 1990s, he led Boca to four league titles, three Libertadores Cups, and two World Club Cups.

During his second term, in 2003, he won another league title, the Libertadores Cup and the World Club Cup.

"Those who know Antonio Conte, have to understand that nothing or no one can influence my decisions. Never"

New Italy coach Conte responds angrily to suggestions that, since part of his salary is paid by Puma, he might prefer players under contract with the sportswear firm

MANAGERS INDEX

The latest rankings of football's most in-demand coaches

1 Diego Simeone

Age: 44
Nationality: Argentinian
Current status: Hugely successful with Atletico Madrid, winning the Spanish Liga and reaching the 2014 Champions League Final.
Past: Won league titles with Estudiantes and River Plate in Argentina, but less successful with San Lorenzo.
Style: Brilliant motivator and organiser.
Future: In contention for "super club" job.

2 Jurgen Klopp

Age: 47
Nationality: German
Current status: Supremo at Borussia Dortmund.
Past: Guided Mainz into Bundesliga for the first time before leaving for Dortmund, who he steered to successive Bundesliga titles in 2011 and 2012, and the 2013 Champions League Final.
Style: Charismatic, bespectacled motivator.
Future: Contracted until 2018 but could be tempted by a really top job.

3 Frank De Boer

Age: 44
Nationality: Dutch
Current status: Led Ajax to a fourth Eredivisie title, a record for a coach.
Past: Ajax youth coach, Holland assistant coach at the 2010 World Cup.
Style: Committed to youth and the Ajax/Barca system of possession-based attack.
Future: Has been linked with Tottenham but may set his sights higher.

4 Roberto Martinez

Age: 41
Nationality: Spanish
Current status: Successful first season at Everton.
Past: Took Swansea into the English second tier, guided Wigan to FA Cup.
Style: Progressive and media friendly, but unproven when it comes to spending big money
Future: Career is on an upward trajectory, so next stop could be a Champions League club.

5 Luciano Spalletti

Age: 55
Nationality: Italian
Current status: Unemployed.
Past: Took Udinese and Roma into the Champions League. Won two Russian league titles with Zenit.
Style: Ambitious, attacking tactics – his Roma played 4-6-0.
Future: A club needing a fresh tactical impetus.

6 Thomas Tuchel

Age: 41
Nationality: German
Current status: Unemployed after leaving Mainz in the summer.
Past: Coach of Mainz for five seasons, during which time the club consistently punched above its weight.
Style: Resourceful, clever tactician, strong motivator.
Future: Won't be out of work for long; he quit Mainz after they refused to release him from his contract.

7 David Moyes

Age: 51
Nationality: Scottish
Current status: Sacked by Man United in April.
Past: Built Preston and Everton sides that made steady progress on modest resources.
Style: Sides that are hard to beat and put function before flair.
Future: Keen to rebuild his reputation, possibly outside the UK.

8 Ralf Rangnick

Age: 56
Nationality: German
Current status: Sporting director at Salzburg and sister club Leipzig.
Past: Worked wonders at Hoffenheim and took Schalke to the Champions League semi-finals in 2011.
Style: Likes his teams to adopt attacking, high-pressing tactics.
Future: A return to frontline coaching.

9 Vitor Pereira

Age: 46
Nationality: Portuguese
Current status: Unemployed after a spell earning petro-dollars in Saudi Arabia with Al Ahli.
Past: Won back-to-back Portuguese league titles with Porto in 2012 and 2013.
Style: Thoughtful, attack-minded, good with young players.
Future: A return to a European league.

10 Roberto Mancini

Age 49
Nationality: Italian
Current status: Unattached after leaving Galatasaray in the summer.
Past: Success in Italy with Lazio, Fiorentina and Inter. Won Premier League title with Manchester City.
Style: Authoritarian tactician.
Future: Keen on a return to England; Serie A a strong possibility.

Key: EXPERIENCED · SUCCESSFUL · VOLATILE · FORMER PLAYER · YOUNG · LONG-TERM STRATEGIST · TACTICIAN · AVAILABLE

11 Tony Pulis, unattached
12 Ernesto Valverde, Athletic Bilbao
13 Quique Flores, unattached
14 Roberto Donadoni, Parma
15 Vincenzo Montella, Fiorentina
16 Paul Clement, Real Madrid (asst coach)
17 Martin Jol, unattached
18 Bert Van Marwijk, unattached
19 Elie Baup, unattached
20 Bernd Schuster, unattached

21 Huub Stevens, unattached
22 Pepe Mel, unattached
23 Miroslav Djukic, unattached
24 Mario Been, unattached
25 Jesualdo Ferreira, unattached
26 Jorge Jesus, Benfica
27 Lluis Carreras, Mallorca
28 Markus Wienzierl, Augsburg
29 Christophe Galtier, Saint-Etienne
30 Philippe Montanier, Rennes
31 Antoine Kombouare, Lens
32 Sinisa Mihajlovic, Sampdoria
33 Giuseppe Iachini, Palermo
34 Chris Hughton, unattached
35 Erwin Van de Looi, Groningen
36 Guy Luzon, Standard Liege
37 Michel, Olympiakos
38 Ramon Diaz, unattached

39 Luis Zubeldia, LDU Quito
40 Rene Meulensteen, unattached
41 Neil Lennon, unattached
42 Sascha Lewandowski, Leverkusen youth
43 Cesare Prandelli, Galatasaray
44 Alejandro Sabella, unattached
45 Luigi Di Biagio, Italy U21
46 Eusebio, Barcelona B
47 Roberto Di Matteo, unattached
48 Frederic Antonetti, unattached
49 Jose Luis Pinto, unattached
50 Frank Kramer, Greuther Furth

More information on the Index at **worldsoccer.com**

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Four more years of Blatter, Lord help us all

Blatter lives, Blatter rules, and FIFA will continue to be a slough of despond, an Augean Stables, a moral slum.

We already know that when the next presidential vote takes place, every single federation but the Europeans will vote for this ineffable person to continue in office for a fifth time.

Who can or will oppose him? Not Michel Platini who, realising he had no hope of success, has announced his non-participation. Not that he would have been any better than the lesser evil.

As, alas, we know, he voted for Qatar as the World Cup hosts in 2022. Then, utterly against the basic interests of the UEFA clubs he is meant to represent, he was even in favour of holding the tournament in winter.

In dire addition, he has undermined the European Championship, not only by a Blatter-like bloating of the participants. Platini failed to realise in time that Turkey would be prepared to host the finals in 2020, and instead located them ludicrously across the continent.

What a great player. What a rotten administrator.

There did seem a slight glimmer of hope when the name Sunil Gulati was heard. Top man now of USA soccer, lively, honest and highly intelligent, a professor at Columbia university, he has every qualification to be a president of FIFA. For arguably that reason, he has no hope of ever being chosen.

In a better football world, the European bloc, UEFA, could refuse to endorse Blatter and, ideally, walk out of a FIFA which would be economically broken. I wish I could imagine that happening, but look back over the long, sordid Havelange years and you will see all too clearly how unlikely such a development would be.

The Torres enigma

The Fernando Torres affair perplexes me. Why did Milan want him, even gratis? Once a resplendent centre-forward for Spain, hero of a winning European Championship, it became all too sadly obvious as his form waned at Liverpool that for some unexplained reason he was a busted flush.

> "In a better football world, UEFA could refuse to endorse Blatter and walk out of a FIFA which would be economically broken"

That didn't stop Chelsea, allegedly and presumably under the mistaken impulse of its billionaire oligarch owner Roman Abramovich, paying £50million for him and paying him a ridiculous £9m a year. Yet there seems to be some kind of a tacit conspiracy of illusion about him and his form. Spain's manager Vicente Del Bosque had no oligarch potentially breathing down his neck, yet he called up Torres for successive World Cups when the bolt had well and truly been shot.

He even came on briefly in the South African Final and he was peripherally involved in the winning goal. In Brazil, there he was bizarrely again, despite such limited and largely ineffectual times at Stamford Bridge.

Fast forward to this season's early Chelsea home game against Leicester City, which I happened to attend. Torres played no part in it but afterwards, when asked about him. Jose Mourinho, in what one might call Pinocchio-style, was singing his praises and stressing his importance to the team.

Just days later we learned that Chelsea were trying to sell him to a credulous Milan.

Was Mourinho, dare one ask, trying to talk him up, with a view to a deal? Of course not. Perish the thought. But now he has gone. At Chelsea's expense.

New start...Torres at San Siro in Milan

A scandal compounded by the LMA

The repugnant exchanges between Malky Mackay and his sidekick Iain Moody while both were at Cardiff City had a deplorable sequel in the half-baked attempt by the League Managers Association to

Repugnant...the exchanges between Moody (left) and Mackay were deplorable

Colour change...Arsenal wore their new yellow change kit for their away game at Everton rather than their traditional red

investigate the matter.

Jews, women, homosexuals, Orientals and blacks were all crudely and gratuitously abused. A scandal compounded when the LMA issued a lame-brained statement which, while acknowledging the outrage of the various insults, adds the feeble palliative that "Malky felt under great pressure, when he was letting off steam to a friend during some friendly text message banter".

Some banter! One might add that, somewhat in common with the old Roman adage in vino veritas, "in wine there is the truth," you might say that truth will also tend to emerge under such alleged pressure.

Quite properly there have been calls for the resignation of the chief executive of the LMA, Richard Bevan, who clearly must take responsibility whether he devised his body's daft communication or not; one which limply sat on the fence over the ghastly Mackay-Moody excesses, only to be forced almost at once to make an abject apology.

But little real emphasis has been so far placed on what is surely a central rather than peripheral aspect of the horrid affair. That is to say, the grovelling abasement made by Mackay to the Cardiff owner Vincent Tan, withdrawing his initial demand for £7.5m compensation, hardly a bagatelle, apologising without reservation for any offence he might have caused referring to a settlement which had been reached.

What kind of a settlement you may well ask; grovelling apart? Had he and perhaps Moody realised their incriminatory emails were going to be released?

Not that Cardiff's Tan himself has ever seemed an endearing rather than arrogant figure. His decision on manifestly superstitious grounds to change the blue colours Cardiff had worn for so long to red, because red was supposed to be a lucky colour, was an insult to the club and its long tradition, which included being the only team to take the FA Cup out of England (in 1927, against Arsenal and Welsh goalkeeper Danny Lewis' ghastly mistake).

Colour blindness

Talking of club colours, what on earth possessed Arsenal to embrace the multi-colours chromatic disaster of their new away strip? Evoking unhappy memories of the time, some years ago, when they wore as a second strip an equally appalling design: a multiplicity of different coloured squares – yellow, red and black if I remember correctly, though it is tempting not to.

The present dire lapse of taste compounded by the fact that at Goodison Park, when they played and drew their second league match of the season against Everton, there was no colour clash whatsoever. Unless some colour blind individual at The Emirates believe that red and blue resemble one another.

This deplorable habit of wearing a special away kit no matter how unnecessary was also evident a week earlier when at Queens Park Rangers, who as we all know wear blue and white hoops, one saw Hull City, whose normal colours are of course yellow, turn out in black. Is it all as so often just a question of money, some kind of perverse deal with the manufacturers of club's shirts with payment involved?

Surely a club of Arsenal's stature with Arsenal's income should be well above that kind of petty deal. I'm reminded that when I lived in Italy in the 1950s, the rule was – I've no idea whether it still is – that whenever there was a colour clash it was the home team which had to change, the sensible idea being that the home crowd would be glad to watch the away team in their normal colours.

So many questions for Van Gaal

These early weeks of the new season have seen a managerial maelstrom. Does Louis Van Gaal now regret the plainly poisoned chalice at Manchester United? Was there an element of hubris in his thinking, given the plain limitations of his resources, that he could do a far better job than the hapless David Moyes?

Moyes might have been said to have been sucked into it by Alex Ferguson, who may in the last of his remarkable seasons have won the league title yet again, but he inherited a team which was manifestly falling apart.

Fresh from his relative success in Brazil, and that 5-1 thrashing of Spain, that 3-0 beating of Brazil, had Van Gaal truly assessed the resources that awaited him at Old Trafford? How quick he was to tell us which players would be on their way. And desperate it would seem when United paid £70million plus and some £200,000 a week for Angel Di Maria, who will hardly shore up a leaky defence or galvanise a central midfield so plainly lacking. Nor would Falcao.

Trying to impose his favoured 3-5-2 formation on his team merely emphasised United's lacunae. Van Gaal is still singing an optimistic song, but the impression persists that in his supreme self-confidence, he may have bitten off even more than he can chew. For all the vast last expenditure. **WS**

● Read Brian Glanville's exclusive online column at worldsoccer.com

Pressure...has Van Gaal bitten off more than he can chew with United?

Destinati France

The campaign to qualify for Euro 2016 kicked off this month, with more teams than ever confident of reaching the finals

By Gavin Hamilton

on

Less than two months since the World Cup Final, here we go again. The qualifying campaign for the 2016 European Championship got underway in early September, with UEFA heralding a number of important changes to the qualification process.

The 2016 finals in France will be the first to feature 24 teams, meaning that almost half of UEFA's 54-strong membership will qualify for the finals.

The qualification process is relatively straightforward. The top two teams from nine groups, along with the top third-placed team, will qualify directly for the finals, with the eight other third-placed sides meeting in two-legged play-offs in autumn 2015 to decide the final four places alongside hosts France.

Alongside the expanded format, UEFA is also promoting a new fixture concept under the banner of the "Week of Football". Each round of matches will take place over a six-day period from Thursday to Tuesday. Each day will provide eight to 10 matches, instead of the previous 20 to 30 games on the same day. Kick-off times will be co-ordinated (5pm and 7.45pm on Saturdays and Sundays) and at 7.45pm for Thursdays, Fridays, Mondays and Tuesdays. On double-header matchweeks, teams will play on Thursday and Sunday, Friday and Monday, or Saturday and Tuesday.

Once again, television is calling the shots. UEFA has centralised the TV rights process, earning extra revenue for member countries.

"The centralisation of matches through the concept of the Week of Football will put the national teams in a prime position and give them greater visibility," said UEFA general-secretary Gianni Infantino, "while at the same time giving the fans more matches to follow and more excitement."

England manager Roy Hodgson has already expressed concern that the new schedule may restrict preparation time with his players and the early signs were that fans will be turned off by the new timetable. Only 20,000 tickets were sold for England's friendly against Norway in early September at Wembley, a venue

which hosted near-full houses for the visits of San Marino and Moldova during the 2014 World Cup qualifiers.

It is easy to understand the apathy towards England. The retirement of Steven Gerrard and Frank Lampard has left Hodgson with limited midfield options, prompting him to call up uncapped Newcastle United midfielder Jack Colback, alongside other youngsters such as Calum Chambers, Danny Rose and Fabian Delph.

Hodgson has been backed by the Football Association despite some tabloid calls for his head following England's disappointing campaign in Brazil. Yet the majority of European World Cup participants have also stuck by their coaches.

Fabio Capello may well have expected a call from his Russian employers after a hugely disappointing campaign. Yet the Italian is set to stay in charge of the 2018 World Cup hosts as they seek to uncover new talent.

In Spain, Vicente Del Bosque carries on despite his team's humiliating defeats by Holland and Chile in Brazil. He will have to make do without key midfielders Xavi and Xabi Alonso, who have both announced their retirement from international action.

Elsewhere, Marc Wilmots (Belgium), Paulo Bento (Portugal), Safet Susic (Bosnia-Herzegovina) and Nico Kovac (Croatia) have all stayed on for another qualification cycle.

One man who could have been forgiven for seeking a new challenge at club level was Germany's victorious World Cup coach Joachim Low. Yet he has insisted he will see out his contract, which runs until 2016.

Low has also lost a number of key players to retirement, notably his captain in Brazil, Philipp Lahm, record scorer Miroslav Klose and defender Per Mertesacker. But there is no shortage of quality replacements. Bastian Schweinsteiger has been named as Germany's new captain, while Marco Reus, who was injured on the eve of the World Cup, was named in Low's latest squad.

Backed...Hodgson has the support of the Football Association

France have been weakened by the retirements of Franck Ribery and Samir Nasri, while new Italy coach Antonio Conte has yet to confirm whether 35-year-old Andrea Pirlo is still willing to soldier on for his country. Pirlo quit in the aftermath of Italy's World Cup exit but there have been suggestions he may have reconsidered. Injury prevented a possible call-up to Conte's first squad.

Further down the European food chain, Norway's Brede Hangeland announced his retirement. The giant defender's physical powers may be on the wane but his decision will be a blow for Norway as one of the middle-ranking countries who can now entertain serious ambitions of a play-off place in the Euro 2016 qualifiers.

Conte was the most high-profile of a handful of new appointments, alongside Guus Hiddink's return to Holland, replacing Louis Van Gaal. Claudio Ranieri was a left-field selection by Greece, while Switzerland opted for experience with their choice of Vladimir Petkovic to replace Ottmar Hitzfeld.

> In Spain, Vicente Del Bosque carries on despite his team's humiliating defeats by Holland and Chile in Brazil

Gone...Xavi (left) and Alonso have both retired internationally

CONTE'S CHALLENGE

One of the biggest disappointments of Italy's miserable Brazil World Cup campaign was that it led to the resignation of Cesare Prandelli, a gifted coach whose world view stretched far beyond the normal boundaries of professional football. Furthermore, for much of his four years in charge of Italy,

GROUP A

Holland
Coach Guus Hiddink (since July 2014)
Captain Robin Van Persie
FIFA ranking 3rd (2nd in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 9th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 1st in Group D

Czech Republic
Coach Pavel Vrba (since Nov 2013)
Captain Tomas Rosicky
FIFA ranking 35th (22nd in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 14th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 3rd in Group B

Turkey
Coach Fatih Terim (since August 2013)
Captain Selcuk Inan
FIFA ranking 32nd (20th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 12th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 4th in Group D

Latvia
Coach Marian Pahars (since July 2013)
Captain Kaspars Gorkis
FIFA ranking 100th (44th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 46th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 5th in Group G

Iceland
Coaches Lars Lagerbeck and Heimir Hallgrimsson (since autumn 2013)
Captain Aron Gunnarsson
FIFA ranking 46th (28th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 35th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 2nd in Group E

Kazakhstan
Coach Yuri Krasnozhan (since Feb 2014)
Captain Kairat Nurdauletov
FIFA ranking 131st (47th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 32nd
2014 World Cup qualifying: 5th, Group C

Group A fixtures 2014

SEPTEMBER 9	Czech Republic v Holland	Iceland v Turkey	Kazakhstan v Latvia
OCTOBER 10	Holland v Kazakhstan	Latvia v Iceland	Turkey v Czech Republic
OCTOBER 13	Iceland v Holland	Kazakhstan v Czech Republic	Latvia v Turkey
NOVEMBER 16	Czech Republic v Iceland	Holland v Latvia	Turkey v Kazakhstan

Group A fixtures 2015

MARCH 28	Czech Republic v Latvia	Holland v Turkey	Kazakhstan v Iceland
JUNE 12	Iceland v Czech Republic	Kazakhstan v Turkey	Latvia v Holland
SEPTEMBER 3	Czech Republic v Kazakhstan	Holland v Iceland	Turkey v Latvia
SEPTEMBER 6	Iceland v Kazakhstan	Latvia v Czech Republic	Turkey v Holland
OCTOBER 10	Czech Republic v Turkey	Iceland v Latvia	Kazakhstan v Holland
OCTOBER 13	Holland v Czech Republic	Latvia v Kazakhstan	Turkey v Iceland

GROUP B

Bosnia
Coach Safet Susic (since 2009)
Captain Edin Dzeko
FIFA ranking 19th (11th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 36th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 1st in Group G

Belgium
Coach Marc Wilmots (since May 2012)
Captain Vincent Kompany
FIFA ranking 19th (3rd in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 10th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 1st in Group A

Israel
Coach Eli Guttmann (since Dec 2011)
Captain Yossi Benayoun
FIFA ranking 68th (34th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 19th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 3rd in Group F

Wales
Coach Chris Coleman (since Jan 2012)
Captain Ashley Williams
FIFA ranking 41st (26th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 50th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 5th in Group A

Cyprus
Coach Pambos Christodoulou (Jan 2014)
Captain Michalis Konstantinou
FIFA ranking 140th (48th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 17th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 6th in Group E

Andorra
Coach Koldo Alvarez (since Feb 2010)
Captain Oscar Soneje
FIFA ranking 199th (52nd in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 52nd
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 6th in Group D

Group B fixtures 2014

SEPTEMBER 9	Andorra v Wales	Bosnia-Herzegovina v Cyprus	Israel v Belgium
OCTOBER 10	Belgium v Andorra	Cyprus v Israel	Wales v Bosnia-Herzegovina
OCTOBER 13	Andorra v Israel	Bosnia-Herzegovina v Belgium	Wales v Cyprus
NOVEMBER 16	Belgium v Wales	Cyprus v Andorra	Israel v Bosnia-Herzegovina

Group B fixtures 2015

MARCH 28	Andorra v Bosnia-Herzegovina	Belgium v Cyprus	Israel v Wales
JUNE 12	Andorra v Cyprus	Bosnia-Herzegovina v Israel	Wales v Belgium
SEPTEMBER 3	Belgium v Bosnia-Herzegovina	Cyprus v Wales	Israel v Andorra
SEPTEMBER 6	Bosnia-Herzegovina v Andorra	Cyprus v Belgium	Wales v Israel
OCTOBER 10	Andorra v Belgium	Bosnia-Herzegovina v Wales	Israel v Cyprus
OCTOBER 13	Belgium v Israel	Cyprus v Bosnia-Herzegovina	Wales v Andorra

Prandelli had seemed to do a more than reasonable job, as witnessed by Italy's second place finish at the 2012 European Championship in Poland and Ukraine.

Even Prandelli's greatest fans, however, are likely to be feeling good about the choice of Conte as his successor. The 45-year-old is arguably the best Italian coach currently working in Italy, while he can easily be compared with some of Italian football's greatest coaching exiles, men such as Lippi, Ancelotti, Capello, Mancini, Trapattoni, etc.

In three title-winning seasons at Juventus, he has shown himself to be a singleminded coach of terrifying determination, capable of getting winning results at the highest level. Even if the nature and timing of his departure from Juventus this summer prompts more questions than answers, his immediate acceptance of the Italian job (officially

Conte is arguably the best Italian coach working in Italy

End of an era..Germany captain Lahm quit the national side after winning the World Cup

Winner...Conte

GROUP C

Spain
Coach Vicente Del Bosque (since 2008)
Captain Iker Casillas
FIFA ranking 7th (4th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 1st
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 1st in Group I

Belarus
Coach Georgi Kondratiev (since 2011)
Captain Timofei Kalachev
FIFA ranking 88th (39th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 20th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 5th in Group I

Ukraine
Coach Mykhaylo Fomenko (since Dec 2012)
Captain Anatoliy Tymoshchuk
FIFA ranking 22nd (13th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 8th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 2nd in Group H

Macedonia
Coach Bosko Gjurovski (since Nov 2013)
Captain Tome Pacovski
FIFA ranking 76th (38th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 39th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 6th in Group A

Slovakia
Coach Jan Kozak (since July 2013)
Captain Marek Hamsik
FIFA ranking 45th (27th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 29th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 3rd in Group G

Luxembourg
Coach Luc Holtz (since 2010)
Captain Mario Mutsch
FIFA ranking 109th (46th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 46th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 6th in Group F

Group C fixtures 2014			
SEPTEMBER 8	Luxembourg v Belarus	Spain v Macedonia	Ukraine v Slovakia
OCTOBER 9	Belarus v Ukraine	Macedonia v Luxembourg	Slovakia v Spain
OCTOBER 12	Belarus v Slovakia	Luxembourg v Spain	Ukraine v Macedonia
NOVEMBER 15	Luxembourg v Ukraine	Macedonia v Slovakia	Spain v Belarus
Group C fixtures 2015			
MARCH 27	Macedonia v Belarus	Slovakia v Luxembourg	Spain v Ukraine
JUNE 14	Belarus v Spain	Slovakia v Macedonia	Ukraine v Luxembourg
SEPTEMBER 5	Luxembourg v Macedonia	Spain v Slovakia	Ukraine v Belarus
SEPTEMBER 8	Belarus v Luxembourg	Macedonia v Spain	Slovakia v Ukraine
OCTOBER 9	Macedonia v Ukraine	Slovakia v Belarus	Spain v Luxembourg
OCTOBER 12	Belarus v Macedonia	Luxembourg v Slovakia	Ukraine v Spain

confirmed in mid-August) can only be good news for Italian football.

That appointment, too, may have helped new federation president Carlo "Banana Eater" Tavecchio. The embarrassment and consternation generated by Tavecchio's seemingly racist comments this summer was perhaps forgotten, at least temporarily, in the wake of the Conte appointment.

Originally, Tavecchio had spoken of appointing a "low cost" national team coach, perhaps someone from within the federation ranks. In the end, he wisely decided against that, calling on national team sponsors Puma to help out with an €8.2million, two-year contract for Conte through to the European Championship in France.

On the day of his official presentation to the media, Conte immediately seized that bull by the horns, underlining that the team sponsors will have no say in team affairs.

The new coach frankly admitted that he had not expected to be back at work, just five weeks after his break-up with Juventus, saying that he had expected to spend the next 12 months travelling around Europe, watching and waiting as he undertook a refresher course, adding:

"I was waiting for a 'top' club, but then the offer came from the top club of all the top clubs. For me, to win is a sweet condemnation, to lose a short-lived death. I hope to bring that mentality with me to the national team."

In an interview with *Gazzetta dello Sport*, Conte immediately conceded that he will start off with the squad that he inherits from Prandelli. However, within that squad, he will have to resolve one or two delicate problems. As well as the issue of Pirlo, Conte initially dodged the Mario Balotelli question by omitting the Liverpool forward from his first squad. Balotelli was suspended for Italy's opening Euro 2016 qualifer against Holland, so the issue has merely been postponed.

> "I was waiting for a top club, but then the offer came from the top club of all top clubs"
> Antonio Conte on the call from Italy

Other new coaches had different problems to tackle. Vladimir Petkovic, Switzerland's new boss, might have thought that all he had to do when he took over was to carry on where predecessor Ottmar Hitzfeld had left off.

The veteran German coach, who decided not to renew his contract after the World Cup, had left a pretty impressive legacy; a young, attacking team with plenty of years in front of it and which is already regarded as one of the best Switzerland has ever produced. "We are no longer little Switzerland, we should

Banned...Balotelli missed Italy's opening Euro qualifier

Decisions...Petkovic with his first squad as Switzerland coach

GROUP D

Germany
Coach Joachim Low (since July 2006)
Captain Bastian Schweinsteiger
FIFA ranking 1st (1st in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 3rd
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 1st in Group C

Republic of Ireland
Coach Martin O'Neill (since Nov 2013)
Captain Robbie Keane
FIFA ranking 66th (33rd in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 40th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 4th in Group C

Poland
Coach Adam Nawalka (since Nov 2013)
Captain Jakub Blaszczykowski
FIFA ranking 61st (32nd in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 21st
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 4th in Group H

Scotland
Coach Gordon Strachan (since Jan 2013)
Captain Scott Brown
FIFA ranking 28th (17th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 24th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 4th in Group A

Georgia
Coach Temuri Ketsbaia (since Nov 2009)
Captain Jaba Kankava
FIFA ranking 95th (52nd in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 34th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 4th in Group I

Gibraltar
Coach Allen Bula (since May 2013)
Captain Roy Chipolina
FIFA ranking none
UEFA country co-efficient 54th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish none

Group D fixtures 2014			
SEPTEMBER 7	Georgia v Republic of Ireland	Germany v Scotland	Gibraltar v Poland
OCTOBER 11	Poland v Germany	Republic of Ireland v Gibraltar	Scotland v Georgia
OCTOBER 14	Germany v Republic of Ireland	Gibraltar v Georgia	Poland v Scotland
NOVEMBER 14	Georgia v Poland	Germany v Gibraltar	Scotland v Republic of Ireland
Group D fixtures 2015			
JUNE 13	Gibraltar v Germany	Poland v Georgia	Republic of Ireland v Scotland
SEPTEMBER 4	Georgia v Scotland	Germany v Poland	Gibraltar v Republic of Ireland
SEPTEMBER 7	Poland v Gibraltar	Republic of Ireland v Georgia	Scotland v Germany
OCTOBER 8	Georgia v Gibraltar	Republic of Ireland v Germany	Scotland v Poland
OCTOBER 11	Germany v Georgia	Gibraltar v Scotland	Poland v Republic of Ireland

Top team...Conte (second left) with his coaching staff on the training ground

be convinced that we are good enough to dominate every team in the group and to beat every team in the group," said Petkovic.

But things have maybe not been quite as straightforward as the Bosnia-born coach would have hoped for. Before he could even name his first squad, for the Euro 2016 qualifier at home to England, Diego Benaglio, Switzerland's top goalkeeper and the first choice for six years, announced his international retirement at the age of 31. That in itself is not too worrying as his understudy, Yann Sommer, is a perfectly able replacement and has the potential to become just as good. But other developments may give him more cause for concern.

One of Hitzfeld's big worries, that top Swiss players could struggle to get a game at their foreign clubs, seems to

GROUP E

England
Coach Roy Hodgson (since May 2012)
Captain Wayne Rooney
FIFA ranking 20th (12th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 2nd
2014 World Cup qualifying 1st, Group H

Switzerland
Coach Vladimir Petkovic (since July 2014)
Captain Gokhan Inler
FIFA ranking 9th (5th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 11th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 1st in Group E

Slovenia
Coach Srecko Katenec (since Jan 2013)
Captain Bostjan Cesar
FIFA ranking 39th (24th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 28th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 3rd in Group E

Estonia
Coach Magnus Pehrsson (since Nov 2013)
Captain Ragnar Klavan
FIFA ranking 93rd (40th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 48th
2014 World Cup qualifying 5th in Group D

Lithuania
Coach Igoris Pankratjevas (since Sep 2013
Captain Marius Stankevicius
FIFA ranking 103rd (45th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 45th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 4th in Group G

San Marino
Coach Pierangelo Manzaroli (since Jan 2014)
Captain Andy Selva
FIFA ranking 208th (53d in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 53rd
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 6th in Group H

Group E fixtures 2014

SEPTEMBER 8	Estonia v Slovenia	San Marino v Lithuania	Switzerland v England
OCTOBER 9	England v San Marino	Lithuania v Estonia	Slovenia v Switzerland
OCTOBER 12	Estonia v England	Lithuania v Slovenia	--
OCTOBER 14	San Marino v Switzerland	--	--
NOVEMBER 15	England v Slovenia	San Marino v Estonia	Switzerland v Lithuania

Group E fixtures 2015

MARCH 27	England v Lithuania	Slovenia v San Marino	Switzerland v Estonia
JUNE 14	Estonia v San Marino	Lithuania v Switzerland	Slovenia v England
SEPTEMBER 5	Estonia v Lithuania	San Marino v England	Switzerland v Slovenia
SEPTEMBER 8	England v Switzerland	Lithuania v San Marino	Slovenia v Estonia
OCTOBER 9	England v Estonia	Slovenia v Lithuania	Switzerland v San Marino
OCTOBER 12	Estonia v Switzerland	Lithuania v England	San Marino v Slovenia

GROUP F

Greece
Coach Claudio Ranieri (since Aug 2014)
Captain Dimitris Salpingidis
FIFA ranking 13th (8th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 13th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 2nd in Group G

Hungary
Coach Attila Pinter (since Dec 2013)
Captain Zoltan Gera
FIFA ranking 34th (21st in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 31st
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 3rd in Group D

Romania
Coach Victor Piturca (since June 2011)
Captain Ciprian Marica
FIFA ranking 27th (16th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 15th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 2nd in Group D

Finland
Coach Mixu Paatelainen (since Mar 2011)
Captain Niklas Moisander
FIFA ranking 55th (31st in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 37th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 3rd in Group I

Northern Ireland
Coach Michael O'Neill (since Dec 2011)
Captain Steven Davis
FIFA ranking 95th (41st in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 44th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 5th in Group F

Faroe Islands
Coach Lars Olsen (since 2011)
Captain Frooi Benjaminsen
FIFA ranking 183rd (51st in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 49th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 6th in Group C

Group F fixtures 2014

SEPTEMBER 7	Faroe Islands v Finland	Greece v Romania	Hungary v Northern Ireland
OCTOBER 11	Finland v Greece	Northern Ireland v Faroe Islands	Romania v Hungary
OCTOBER 14	Faroe Islands v Hungary	Finland v Romania	Greece v Northern Ireland
NOVEMBER 14	Greece v Faroe Islands	Hungary v Finland	Romania v Northern Ireland

Group F fixtures 2015

MARCH 29	Hungary v Greece	Northern Ireland v Finland	Romania v Faroe Islands
JUNE 13	Faroe Islands v Greece	Finland v Hungary	Northern Ireland v Romania
SEPTEMBER 4	Faroe Islands v Northern Ireland	Greece v Finland	Hungary v Romania
SEPTEMBER 7	Finland v Faroe Islands	Northern Ireland v Hungary	Romania v Greece
OCTOBER 8	Hungary v Faroe Islands	Northern Ireland v Greece	Romania v Finland
OCTOBER 11	Faroe Islands v Romania	Finland v Northern Ireland	Greece v Hungary

have come true. Xherdan Shaqiri, whose hat-trick against Honduras carried Switzerland to the last 16 in Brazil, has started this season as a bit-part player at Bayern Munich, the same role he played for most of last. Forward Josip Drmic has also been given a place on the subs' bench at his new club Borussia Monchengladbach and captain Gokhan Inler is no longer the commanding presence he once was at Napoli and tends to get rotated by coach Rafael Benitez a good deal more than some of his team mates. "They must not let their heads drop," said Petkovic. "I felt they had the will to prove their qualities."

Those players at least kept their places in the squad, which was more than could be said for midfielder Tranquillo Barnetta, who has fallen completely out of favour at Schalke, and Reto Ziegler is without a club after his loan ended at Sassuolo and he returned to Juventus who decided not to renew his contract.

> "They must not let heads drop. They had the will to prove their qualities"
> Switzerland coach Vladimir Petkovic stands by those players who are not regular starters for their club sides

The most notable change in Petkovic's first squad was the return of 22-year-old midfielder Pajtim Kasami, who missed out on the World Cup because of a lack of first-team football at Fulham. Basle midfielder Fabian Frei was also recalled for the first time in two years.

In Greece, Claudio Ranieri made an impact with his first team selection for the Euro 2016 initial qualifying match against Romania by leaving out six players from Fernando Santos' squad which reached the last 16 of the World Cup 2014.

The Italian invited two uncapped

Changes...Ranieri left out six players from the summer's World Cup squad

Included...Gibraltar take their place in the qualifiers

GROUP G

Russia
Coach Fabio Capello (since July 2012)
Captain Vasily Berezutsky
FIFA ranking 23rd (14th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 6th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 1st in Group F

Sweden
Coach Erik Hamren (since Nov 2009)
Captain Zlatan Ibrahimovic
FIFA ranking 29th (18th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 23rd
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 2nd in Group C

Austria
Coach Marcel Koller (since Nov 2011)
Captain Marc Janko
FIFA ranking 40th (25th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 16th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 3rd in Group C

Montenegro
Coach Branco Brnovic (since Sep 2011)
Captain Mirko Vucinic
FIFA ranking 49th (29th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 41st
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 3rd in Group H

Moldova
Coach Ion Caras (since 2012)
Captain Alexandru Epureanu
FIFA ranking 99th (43rd in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 33rd
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 5th in Group H

Liechtenstein
Coach Rene Pauritsch (since 2013)
Captain Mario Frick
FIFA ranking 167th (50th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 38th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish 6th in Group G

Group G fixtures 2014			
SEPTEMBER 8	Austria v Sweden	Montenegro v Moldova	Russia v Liechtenstein
OCTOBER 9	Liechtenstein v Montenegro	Moldova v Austria	Sweden v Russia
OCTOBER 12	Austria v Montenegro	Russia v Moldova	Sweden v Liechtenstein
NOVEMBER 15	Austria v Russia	Moldova v Liechtenstein	Montenegro v Sweden
Group G fixtures 2015			
MARCH 27	Liechtenstein v Austria	Moldova v Sweden	Montenegro v Russia
JUNE 14	Liechtenstein v Moldova	Russia v Austria	Sweden v Montenegro
SEPTEMBER 5	Austria v Moldova	Montenegro v Liechtenstein	Russia v Sweden
SEPTEMBER 8	Liechtenstein v Russia	Moldova v Montenegro	Sweden v Austria
OCTOBER 9	Liechtenstein v Sweden	Moldova v Russia	Montenegro v Austria
OCTOBER 12	Austria v Liechtenstein	Russia v Montenegro	Sweden v Moldova

GROUP H

New format... Romania (in yellow) and Hungary could make it to France

players: Olympiakos striker Dimitris Diamantakos, who excelled in pre-season for the Greek champions, and Levante defender Nikos Karabelas, who was a regular with the Spanish club last season.

Left out from the World Cup squad were several key figures, including co-captains in Brazil, Giorgos Karagounis and Kostas Katsouranis. One of the first moves by Ranieri was to request a full report of the players from under-21 coach Kostas Tsanas as he seeks to upgrade the national squad with younger players.

Given their excellent recent qualifying record, Greece will be disappointed if they fail to make Euro 2016 in France, especially given the new format.

The 24-team finals in two years time represents a golden opportunity for many of Europe's big shots from the past – Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Austria, Poland – to qualify, while up-and-coming nations such as Armenia and Montenegro will also fancy their chances.

External factors may impact on other countries, notably Ukraine, where football in the east of the country has been severely affected by the conflict with neightbouring Russia, and Israel whose game against Belgium on September 9 has been rescheduled for next March.

One country that will not worry about such issues is Gibraltar, who are taking part in their first qualifying campaign since joining UEFA last year. Their arrival has increased UEFA's membership to 54. The Euro expansion continues. **WS**

GROUP I

Italy
Coach Antonio Conte (since Aug 2014)
Captain Gianluigi Buffon
FIFA ranking 14th (9th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 5th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish
1st in Group B

Croatia
Coach Nico Kovac (since Oct 2013)
Captain Darijo Srna
FIFA ranking 16th (10th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 18th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish
2nd in Group A

Norway
Coach Per-Mathias Hogmo (since Sep 2013)
Captain Per Ciljan Skjelbred
FIFA ranking 53rd (30th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 26th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish
4th in Group E

Bulgaria
Coach Luboslav Penev (since Oct 2011)
Captain Ivelin Popov
FIFA ranking 72nd (36th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 25th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish
4th in Group B

Azerbaijan
Coach Berti Vogts (since April 2008)
Captain Rashad Sadygov
FIFA ranking 73rd (37th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 30th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish
4th in Group F

Malta
Coach Pietro Ghedin (since May 2012)
Captain Michael Mifsud
FIFA ranking (in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient
2014 World Cup qualifying finish
6th in Group B

Portugal
Coach Paulo Bento (since Sep 2010)
Captain Cristiano Ronaldo
FIFA ranking 11th (7th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 4th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish
2nd in Group F

Denmark
Coach Morten Olsen (since July 2000)
Captain Daniel Agger
FIFA ranking 26th (15th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 22nd
2014 World Cup qualifying finish
2nd in Group B

Serbia
Coach Dick Advocaat (since July 2014)
Captain Branislav Ivanovic
FIFA ranking 31st (19th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 27th
2014 World Cup qualifying finish
3rd in Group A

Armenia
Coach Gianni De Biasi (since Dec 2011)
Captain Lorik Cana
FIFA ranking 70th (35th in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 42nd
2014 World Cup qualifying finish
5th in Group E

Albania
Coach Bernard Challandes (since Feb 2014)
Captain Roman Berezovsky
FIFA ranking 36th (23rd in Europe)
UEFA country co-efficient 51st
2014 World Cup qualifying finish
5th in Group B

Group H fixtures 2014

SEPTEMBER 9	Azerbaijan v Bulgaria	Croatia v Malta	Norway v Italy
OCTOBER 10	Bulgaria v Croatia	Italy v Azerbaijan	Malta v Norway
OCTOBER 13	Croatia v Azerbaijan	Malta v Italy	Norway v Bulgaria
NOVEMBER 16	Azerbaijan v Norway	Bulgaria v Malta	Italy v Croatia

Group H fixtures 2015

MARCH 28	Azerbaijan v Malta	Bulgaria v Italy	Croatia v Norway
JUNE 12	Croatia v Italy	Malta v Bulgaria	Norway v Azerbaijan
SEPTEMBER 3	Azerbaijan v Croatia	Bulgaria v Norway	Italy v Malta
SEPTEMBER 6	Italy v Bulgaria	Malta v Azerbaijan	Norway v Croatia
OCTOBER 10	Azerbaijan v Italy	Croatia v Bulgaria	Norway v Malta
OCTOBER 13	Bulgaria v Azerbaijan	Italy v Norway	Malta v Croatia

Group I fixtures 2014

SEPTEMBER 7	Denmark v Armenia	Portugal v Albania
OCTOBER 11	Albania v Denmark	Armenia v Serbia
OCTOBER 14	Denmark v Portugal	Serbia v Albania
NOVEMBER 14	Portugal v Armenia	Serbia v Denmark

Group I fixtures 2015

MARCH 29	Albania v Armenia	Portugal v Serbia
JUNE 13	Armenia v Portugal	Denmark v Serbia
SEPTEMBER 4	Denmark v Albania	Serbia v Armenia
SEPTEMBER 7	Albania v Portugal	Armenia v Denmark
OCTOBER 8	Albania v Serbia	Portugal v Denmark
OCTOBER 11	Armenia v Albania	Serbia v Portugal

EURO 2016

THE STADIUMS

The finals will be played in 10 different stadiums around France. Three – Bordeaux, Lyon and Nice – have been built for the tournament, while Lille was opened in 2012. The 1998 World Cup venues at Lens, Marseille, Saint-Etienne and Toulouse have all been upgraded. Stade de France in Paris will host the opening match and Final.

NEW STADIUM **LILLE** Capacity: 50,186

BORDEAUX Capacity: 42,052 NEW STADIUM

NEW STADIUM **NICE** Capacity: 35,624

UPGRADED **MARSEILLE** Capacity: 67,500

UPGRADED **TOULOUSE** Capacity: 33,300

UPGRADED **SAINT-ETIENNE** Capacity: 41,965

PARIS STADE DE FRANCE Capacity: 81,338

LYON Capacity: 58,215 NEW STADIUM

UPGRADED **LENS** Capacity: 38,223

PARIS PARC DES PRINCES Capacity: 47,000

Dispatches

Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents

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What happens next after three Crimean clubs join the Russian football league?

TIM VICKERY

Libertadores champions at last

San Lorenzo became the last of Argentina's "big five" to win the continent's major club competition

Semi-finalists in the inaugural Libertadores Cup back in 1960, San Lorenzo had to wait until the 55th version of South America's premier club competition to finally get their name on the trophy. On a nervy night in Buenos Aires they became the eighth Argentinian club to win the competition, beating Nacional of Paraguay 1-0 to take the title 2-1 on aggregate.

Edgardo Bauza, who won the competition as coach of Ecuador's LDU Quito six years earlier, was quick to confess that his team had not been at their best on the night. Indeed, the first 30 minutes of the second leg was a showcase for the virtues that had taken Nacional, a traditional but tiny club from Asuncion, past the group stage for the first time. Under coach Gustavo Morinigo, Nacional looked to break with pace and purpose, with Marcos Melgarejo drifting in from the right to support striker Fredy Bareiro, Julian Benitez doing likewise from the left, and Silvio Torales and Derlis Orue piling forward. All five were in the penalty area when Nacional had an early chance, Orue's shot glancing off a post.

The Paraguayans were looking comfortable until 10 minutes before half-time, when right-back Ramon Coronel needlessly handled a harmless looking hook from Martin Cauteruccio after a corner, and Nestor Ortigoza stroked home the penalty. Thereafter San Lorenzo played on the counter-attack, while Nacional lacked the guile to break down the home defence. The visitors' clearest chance came when a speculative ball into the box fell for Bareiro, whose left-footed shot was deflected over.

The first leg in Asuncion was a far better demonstration of the virtues of the eventual champions. San Lorenzo had not won an away game during the tournament, but vastly experienced, with only one player under 24, they dominated with a collection of little partnerships. Ortigoza and Juan Mercier won the central-midfield battle; ahead of them veteran playmaker Leandro Romagnoli forged a relationship with striker Mauro Matos; the bright Ignacio Piatti worked well with left-back Emmanuel Mas down one flank while on the other, Hector Villalba combined with attacking right-back Julio Buffarini.

Good possession set up an outstanding goal, with Buffarini, Romagnoli and Villalba all involved as Matos got in front of his marker to meet a cross with a neat volley into the far corner. Nacional looked bereft of ideas until, out of the blue, they equalised with the last kick of the game, Bareiro flicking on a long punt for substitute Julio Santa Cruz to nip in front of the defence and – in the same Estadio Defensores del Chaco where older brother Roque scored so many important goals – he steered a stretching finish into the roof of the net.

> "They put their trust in me and I thank them for that"
> Nestor Ortigoza, scorer of the winning penalty, on his San Lorenzo team-mates

It gave Nacional hope for the second leg, but they hadn't won on their travels either, and despite their promising start in Buenos Aires, from the moment they fell behind in the return leg it was hard to imagine them getting back on even terms.

Nacional had ridden their luck a little to get past Defensor of Uruguay in the semi-finals. They managed to impose themselves on the home leg, building up a 2-0 lead with goas from Brian Montenegro and Orue. Montenegro was brought in for the closing stages of the competition from Libertad and looked in good form until injury kept him out of all but the last half hour of the Final.

Defensor came close to an all-important away goal, and they spent most of the return laying siege to the Paraguayan goal. Like Nacional they are a traditional team with a small fan base, and they played some of the most attractive football in the competition this year. A combination of veterans and youngsters, the midfield was anchored by 39-year-old Andres Fleurquin, while one-time child prodigy Nico Olivera, now 36, provided touches of quality along with pacy 21-year-old Brazilian winger Felipe Gedoz and promising 20-year-old midfielder Giorgian De Arrascaeta.

They hit form in the second half as substitute Adrian Luna pulled a goal back.

BRAZILIAN STRANGLEHOLD BROKEN

San Lorenzo's victory ended a run of four successive Brazilian victories in the Libertadores Cup

Now we're really in the big league...San Lorenzo celebrate their Libertadores Cup triumph

Gedoz then rattled a post and right at the death left-back Robert Herrera struck the bar. Over the two legs Defensor were the better side, but Nacional made it through 2-1 on aggregate.

The other semi-final was not nearly as close. Bolivar of Bolivia completed a shock last-four line-up. With a Spanish coach, Xabier Azkargorta, and three Spanish players in the squad, they were a welcome surprise with their compact, well-organised play. They went into the semi against San Lorenzo on the back of a nine-game unbeaten run, but promptly self-destructed.

True, they had lost top scorer William Ferreira – the Uruguayan was sold to Mexican club Universidad de Guadalajara during the World Cup – but their problems came at the other end. Chaotic defending at set-pieces, along with several other defensive errors, meant San Lorenzo hardly had to break sweat to open up a 5-0 first-leg lead. Despite the altitude of La Paz in the return game, the state of the pitch in the Estadio Hernando Siles did Bolivar no favours and they scored the only goal of the game in second-half stoppage time.

Hardly giants

None of the last four had won the Libertadores before, nor even appeared in the Final. San Lorenzo aside, they were hardly continental giants, while the Brazilian clubs, who these days have a massive financial advantage, all fell early.

Brazil had won the competition in each of the previous four years, but without ever really dominating in a way that might be expected from clubs that can pay wages so much higher than the rest of the continent.

Part of the Brazilian failure this year can be attributed to San Lorenzo, who in the round of 16 and quarter-finals eliminated Gremio and Cruzeiro, the country's strongest representatives.

While San Lorenzo may not have been the greatest of Libertadores winners – as revealed by a record of just six wins in a 14-match campaign – they are a worthy addition to the list of champions. And following Atletico Mineiro and Corinthians, they are the third big club in a row to have won the title for the first time.

This is surely one reason for the continued charm of the Libertadores. Cycles of success are short in South America as teams are torn apart by continued selling. San Lorenzo, for example, lost key players Piatti (Montreal Impact) and Angel Correa (Atletico Madrid) before the end of the campaign. But what is lost in quality is gained in unpredictability.

As an illustration, of all the 16 teams who qualified for the knockout stage, the two with the worst records in the group phase were San Lorenzo and Nacional... the same two sides who decided the destiny of the 55th Libertadores Cup. **WS**

● *See page 77 for Tim Vickery's six of the best at this season's Libertadores Cup*

MARK GLEESON

Quickly back in the swing of things

African Nations Cup qualifiers get under way

Less than a week after Germany captain Philipp Lahm had lifted the World Cup at the Maracana Stadium, some national teams were back in action competing for places at the next African Nations Cup finals. The early stages of the play-offs for the tournament in Morocco, which will be held early next year, kicked off in April and continued on the weekend after the World Cup Final in Rio de Janeiro.

Since the Nations Cup has been shifted to every odd year, the cycle of competition has been thrown horribly out of kilter. The next finals will be held from January 17 to February 8, and to determine the 16-team field Confederation of African Football are squeezing six rounds of group matches into three months.

The recent play-offs decided the seven teams to join the 21 nations given direct entry into the group phase – which has now been overshadowed by the outbreak of the Ebola virus in west Africa.

Guinea and Sierra Leone have been told to move their home games because of fears over spreading the deadly virus, but Nigeria – where there have also been deaths – have avoided the same ban.

The ramifications are ever changing but could be disruptive in the least. Already, Ivory Coast are refusing to allow Sierra Leone into their country for their scheduled game in Group D and there could be more such moves from other concerned countries.

The Ivorians are among the World Cup finalists who start a new chapter in more ways than one since a disappointing tournament in Brazil.

Didier Drogba has called time on his international career, so will miss out on the chance for a final tilt at Nations Cup glory after five successive failures. However, time away in Morocco in mid-season was presumably not an option when Chelsea offered the 36-year-old a contract for this season.

All change...Herve Renard, coach of 2012 African champions Zambia, is taking over finalists Ivory Coast

Herve Renard is the new coach of Ivory Coast, quickly chosen from a short list of five put together after the Ivorian Football Federation had made the unusual step of publicly calling for candidates to replace Sabri Lamouchi.

Lamouchi's continued tenure with the Ivorian team was always going to be in doubt after the World Cup, even if they had not been so unlucky against Greece and gone on to play in the second round in Brazil, as his relationship with influential players was fractured.

Renard was coach of Zambia when they edged the Ivorians to the 2012 Nations Cup title on penalties after a goalless draw in the Final in Libreville, Gabon – a tournament in which Ivory Coast did not concede a single goal yet did not pick up the trophy.

Christian Gourcuff had been waiting in the wings to become Algeria's new coach even before Brazil when it was obvious that Vahid Halilhodzic wanted out.

Not even a presidential appeal for him to stay swayed the Bosnian, who went from being the object of media scorn to a national hero by taking Algeria past the first round for the first time, and ensuring an honourable World Cup exit as they took Germany to extra-time before losing.

Gourcuff, who was in charge of Lorient in Ligue 1 last season, strengthens French ties with the Algerians.

Nigeria also look to be scrambling for a new coach after Stephen Keshi said he had tired of waiting for a new contract offer, although the fluid nature of football in the giant west African country does not preclude the possibility that he will yet sign a new deal in time for their first Group A qualifier at home to Congo.

In the month since the World Cup Final, there have also been coaching changes for the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, South Africa, Togo and Zambia. All of which meant little time for the new men in charge to prepare for the first group matches.

The top two finishers in each group qualify for Morocco, meaning teams effectively need win only their home matches to stand a good chance of reaching the finals.

> "My mission is to rebuild a new team, all the while knowing that not everything should be thrown away"
>
> New Ivory Coast coach Herve Renard

The toughest group is D in which Ivory Coast, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo are paired – all of them are former continental champions and World Cup finalists.

Despite their shocking showing in Brazil, Cameroon have stuck with German coach Volker Finke, although he has been under much fire in the country. He is insisting he will see out his contract, which still has nine months to run, and he is doggedly refusing to budge. He has also had something of a clean-out for his first two games, including dropping the iconic Samuel Eto'o.

Group G is also intriguing with one from Egypt, Senegal and Tunisia to miss out on the finals in January. WS

STEVE MENARY

Our big match...Palau take on Chuuk at the Micro Games

Mitchell's Micro marvel

Crowdfunding scheme helps Palau to the Games

The idea of a national association president using crowdfunding to get his team to a tournament, and then leading the line when he gets there seems fanciful. But that's exactly what Charles Reklai Mitchell did with Palau at the 2014 Micro Games.

Pohnpei, one of four islands in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), was hosting the eighth Micro Games in July and it was the first to include football as a medal sport. For Palau, one of the last independent countries still not recognised by FIFA, attending was vital to developing the sport, but the players were told they had to pay $300 apiece to cover the 3,000km trip.

Mitchell set up a crowdfunding scheme on GoFundMe.com with the aim of raising $5,000. After the appeal raised pledges of $3,275 the Palau organisers made up the shortfall for the trip to Pohnpei, where a $120,000 grant from the Japanese consulate helped provide the football facilities.

Tropical rainfall and giant frogs are a problem for footballers in Pohnpei and despite the investment, Mitchell admits: "The field wasn't in its best form, but games went on."

The Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) had no involvement but the organisers flew in two referees from Fiji. For Mitchell, the tournament was a big success: he was joint top scorer as Palau reached the Final.

That had all looked highly unlikely at half-time in their first game. Three-nil down to Pohnpei, Mitchell found the net to boost the team's confidence, and they thrashed Chuuk – another FSM island – 5-0 in their next game. A 2-2 draw with Yap ensured a place in the Final and rematch with Pohnpei.

Mitchell, who had also scored against Yap, was on target again in the first half to make the scores level at half-time before Pohnpei went on to win 3-1 again. "For the first time having football in the Micronesian Games, I'd say it was successful," said Mitchell, who was raised in the United States in San Diego.

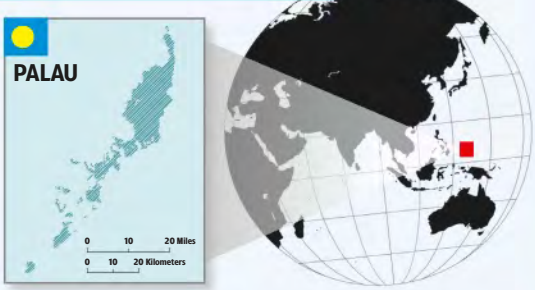
A keen footballer, Mitchell found a dying game when he arrived in Palau seven years ago. The national side had played two games at the 1998 Micro Games, when football was an exhibition event, but lost 15-2 to Guam and 12-1 to the Northern Mariana Islands. Despite the formation of the Palau Football Association in 2002, the sport lagged behind baseball and basketball in terms of popularity.

Mitchell has since taken football into schools and set up a league, and although expats still make up 80 per cent of the players, Africans, Japanese, Nepalese and Taiwanese players all feature. Palau's Bangladeshi community has even fielded its own side in the five-team league, which was last won by Taj. All matches take place at the national track-and-field arena in the main commercial centre of Koror.

Palau was cited as a priority for membership in a 2011 FIFA Small Nations Working Group report. After being contacted by Mitchell, FIFA "pointed [him] to the relevant regulations and procedures listed in the FIFA Statutes". That means joining the OFC first. Mitchell says he has contacted the confederation but not yet received a reply. The OFC, however, claim to have never heard from Mitchell or anyone else in Palau.

With a functioning league and national team, the PFA would appear to merit some help, but with the current stalemate none seems likely. WS

WHERE IN THE WORLD?



Palau comprises around 250 islands south east of the Philippines. Formerly a United Nations Trust territory, it gained independence in 1994.

Population: 21,186
Size: 459 sq km
Capital: Ngerulmud
Languages: Palauan, English, Filipino
Religion: Roman Catholic, Protestant

Local heroes...Palau now has its own five-team league

SIMON HILL
in Sydney

All eyes will be on City

Melbourne's revamped A-League club prepare for life under new ownership

With the 10th season of the A-League approaching, the nascent competition can reflect upon its first decade with satisfaction. There does, however, remain so much more to do.

Back in 2004, when its predecessor – the semi-pro NSL – closed its doors, many wondered if Australia would ever fully embrace the world game. Since then, the national team has qualified for the World Cup three times in a row, helped in part by the switch to the Asian Confederation, which was a coup for the game's governing body, Football Federation Australia (FFA). Meanwhile, the A-League, the country's first attempt at a fully professional club competition, has taken considerable steps towards challenging the established hegemony in a nation where other sports still dominate.

But not everyone loves the franchise-style competition, with some fans of the former NSL clubs feeling excluded and marginalised. Many of those clubs – which predominantly reflected the migrant communities that flocked to Australia in the 1950s – struggled to survive after their demotion to the state leagues. They feel ignored and unloved by a governing body that continues to rely on such grass-roots clubs to produce the Mark Vidukas, Mark Schwarzers and Brett Emertons of the future.

The long overdue introduction of the FFA Cup has at least started the healing process. Famous old clubs such as Sydney Olympic, Melbourne Knights and Adelaide City have eagerly embraced their chance to return to the spotlight and the opportunity to give the A-League clubs a bloody nose – which is exactly what Adelaide City did by defeating Western Sydney Wanderers 1-0 in the round of 32.

Come October though, attentions will switch to the senior competition – and many will be watching the fortunes of Melbourne City in particular.

Formerly Melbourne Heart, the A-League expansion club have struggled for much of their short existence, but now – under Manchester City's ownership – expectations are sky high.

The main reason is the acquisition of David Villa, albeit on loan from New York City for just 10 games. The Spanish World Cup winner is by far the highest-profile arrival of the off-season but, to supplement the 32-year-old's arrival, City have also snared former West Bromwich Albion and Hull City midfielder, Robert Koren as their "marquee" player, along with Republic of Ireland winger Damien Duff.

The trio should be enough to boost City's attendances, which had plateaued around the 9,000 mark, but suspicions remain that Manchester City's collection of clubs is as much an attempt to circumvent UEFA's Financial Fairplay rules as any emotional attachment to the A-League. Time will tell whether that theory holds water.

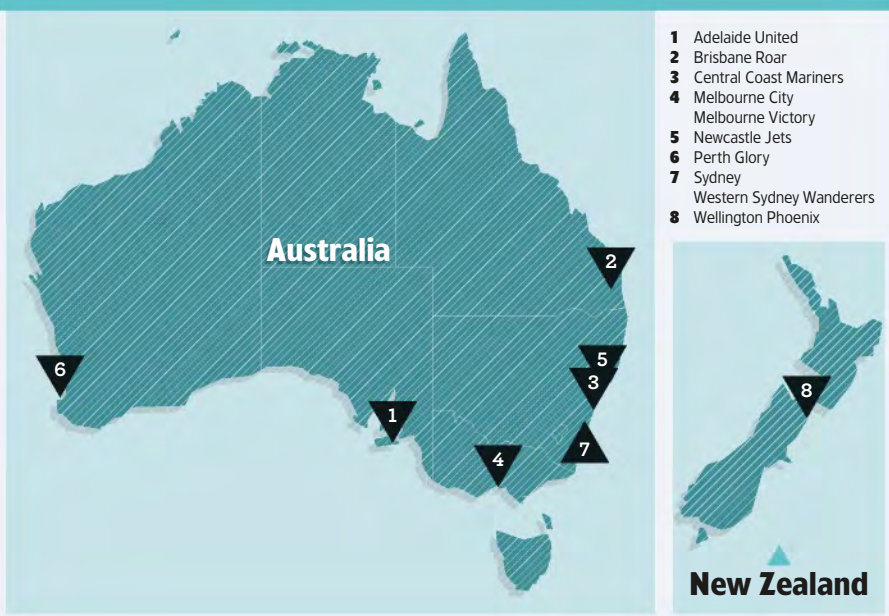
Across town, Melbourne Victory have responded to City's newly-acquired largesse by signing the league's most potent goalscorer in Besart Berisha, adding national-team midfielder Carl Valeri and French defender Matthieu Delpierre for good measure. The latter will be expected to shore up a notoriously leaky defence.

Berisha's departure from champions Brisbane Roar goes to the heart of a conundrum the A-League must attempt to solve over the coming years.

With a strict salary cap in place, Brisbane were unable to meet the player's increased wage demands – demands that were reasonable enough,

Name change, colour change...Melbourne City players in the club's new home and away strips

A-LEAGUE CLUBS 2014-15



1 Adelaide United
2 Brisbane Roar
3 Central Coast Mariners
4 Melbourne City
Melbourne Victory
5 Newcastle Jets
6 Perth Glory
7 Sydney
Western Sydney Wanderers
8 Wellington Phoenix

Game on...Adelaide City (black and white) take on Western Sydney Wanderers in the FFA Cup

> "It's been a big change for everyone, but this is a great opportunity for the club"
>
> Melbourne City defender Jason Hoffman, who has been with the club since they began life as Melbourne Heart

Roar's loss...salary-cap problems forced the Brisbane club to sell star striker Berisha to Melbourne Victory

after 48 goals in 76 league games. With German midfielder Thomas Broich, who won the league's best player award last term, as their overseas marquee signing, the club essentially had to choose between the two.

Roar did ask FFA for special dispensation to pay Berisha what he is worth, but they were refused. In essence then, Brisbane's rather dubious reward for introducing a special talent to the league was to lose the striker to one of their main rivals.

KEY DATES

SEASON STARTS October 10, 2014

SEASON ENDS May 10, 2015

Keeping an evenly contested competition is considered essential in Australia, but levelling the playing field at home equals competitive disadvantage overseas in terms of the Asian Champions League. It also means successful clubs struggle to hold on to their players. At some stage the A-League must consider the concept of embracing a capitalist, rather than socialist, model – but at present this remains a thorny issue, especially with club finances still fragile.

Without their striking talisman, Brisbane will look for their fourth title in five years with Mensur Kurtisi given the responsibility of taking over Berisha's mantle. The Macedonian arrives with a modest CV, as did Berisha, but if he has a similar impact Roar may go close again, even though they have also lost the influential Ivan Franjic, who left for Torpedo Moscow.

Sydney should have a much better season under Graham Arnold, who succeeded Frank Farina as coach, via a short – and surprisingly unsuccessful – stint in Japan with Vegalta Sendai. Arnold has added plenty of attacking pedigree in Alex Brosque (who is back for a second stint), Bernie Ibini-Isei, Shane Smeltz and Austrian marquee signing Marc Janko, who replaces the competition's biggest draw, Alessandro Del Piero.

Western Sydney Wanderers will be competitive again under the shrewd stewardship of Tony Popovic. Shinji Ono may have gone, but Brazilian midfielder Vitor Saba and Dutch striker Romeo Castelen have arrived, along with new owners, who paid the governing body around $10million to take the club out of FFA hands.

Elsewhere, the second year of Adelaide United's *tiki-taka* experiment under Josep Gombau should see the Reds climbing higher than their sixth place last season. A now Emile Heskey-less Newcastle Jets, under new coach Phil Stubbins, simply must deliver finals football for the first time in four years.

Perth Glory have again splurged on a host of new signings, including former Republic of Ireland front man Andy Keogh, while Wellington Phoenix have made promising moves into the market to secure Nathan Burns and ex-Sunderland junior Alex Rodriguez. Central Coast Mariners have, as usual, been quiet in the market but will probably still surprise everyone anyway.

The A-League is by no means perfect. Apart from the salary cap, the issue of expansion – which is not easy in a country with only a handful of major cities separated by huge distances – will need to be revisited. Promotion and relegation are but a pipe dream; infrastructure around the clubs remains sparse; and a successor to Frank Lowy as chairman of FFA is yet to be found. Lowy will retire next year after the Asian Cup is played out on Australian soil.

But the A-League has found a place in the Australian sporting landscape, with a solid TV deal and attendances averaging 13,000 last term. It may still trail the other codes, but it's a far cry from its inception in 2005, when Lowy was so unsure of his new baby that he had to publicly beg people to support it. In a hostile market, that's no mean feat. **WS**

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JAMES MONTAGUE
in Kiev

Crimean clubs lost to Russia

No punishment as yet for move seen as a breach of UEFA and FIFA statutes

Sepp Blatter was all smiles on his recent visit to Sochi. The 78-year-old FIFA president was in the host city of the recent Winter Olympics to discuss a number of issues concerning the 2018 World Cup with Russia's president Vladimir Putin.

The two must have relished the meeting, with a chance to discuss plans in a more convivial environment. FIFA has bounced from crisis to crisis over the past four years, with Blatter becoming a cartoon hate figure for many across the world. Wherever he goes, the press has followed, dredging up accusations of FIFA corruption in his wake.

And few can call on an audience with Putin that isn't tangled in a geopolitical web of wars, sanctions and rebellions. Ukraine's east is on fire, thanks to an insurgency that the west believes has been prompted and armed by a Russia fearful of losing Ukraine from its sphere of influence. And then there was the issue of MH17, the airliner that was shot down over eastern Ukraine, taking the lives of all 298 people on board.

The two men sat next to each other at the World Cup Final in Rio this summer too. But Sochi was a chance to look to the future, a World Cup finals in four years time that promised to have none of the problems that bedevilled the build-up to Brazil: namely public unrest, massive misuse of public funds and stadiums delivered at the last second. As Jerome Valcke, FIFA's general-secretary, once said, "less democracy is sometimes better for organising a World Cup". Russia's World Cup, then, ought to be a roaring success.

Blatter discussed operational matters, cutting the number of stadiums and upgrading capacity. Yet the real world can't stay out of football for long and a statement on FIFA's website concluded: "President Blatter also reiterated that FIFA will handle the ongoing matter concerning Crimean football clubs based on the relevant processes that should be overseen by the respective confederation (UEFA) in the first instance."

Questions had already been raised about Russia's hosting of the Sochi Olympics and the 2018 World Cup finals given the shift towards authoritarianism under Putin. But when Russia annexed the Ukrainian territory of Crimea they also

THE THREE UKRAINIAN CLUBS NOW PLAYING IN THE RUSSIAN LEAGUE

Enforced move...coach Angel Chervenkov takes training at Sevastopol, one of three Ukrainian clubs "annexed" by Russia

took with it three football clubs who have now been entered into the Russian pyramid, contravening both UEFA and FIFA's statutes, creating a huge new headache for Blatter and Platini and also calling into question whether the 2018 World Cup can be held in Russia at all.

Just as Blatter was arriving in Sochi, Anatoliy Konkov was sitting in his office next to a large portrait of himself shaking hands with FIFA's president. Konkov is a former USSR international who played for both Shakhtar Donetsk and Dynamo Kiev during the era of the Soviet league. He is in his 50s now, president of the Football Federation of Ukraine and livid that three of his clubs have been taken away from him. "Our strong position is that Ukrainian teams have to be in Ukrainian competition and there is no right for them to take part in Russia," said Konkov, speaking at the federation's offices in Kiev.

Konkov first heard something was wrong when news reached him a few days previously that three teams from Crimea who played in Ukraine last year – Tavriya Simferopol (who finished bottom of the Ukrainian Premier League), Sevastopol (who finished mid table) and a lower league team from Yalta – had been entered into the third tier of the Russian league and played matches in the Russian Cup.

Konkov wrote a furious letter to UEFA and FIFA over Russia "illegally and arbitrarily" taking its clubs. "These clubs are still Ukrainian," he explained. "Nobody gave them to Russia."

Although there is scant precedent for such a move, it appears to breach both UEFA and FIFA statutes, and should have led to the Russian Football Union's suspension at the very least. While UEFA specifically outlaws "combinations and alliances" of clubs from different associations, FIFA would allow such a move if both sides agreed, which is highly unlikely to ever happen.

"Of course we didn't allow that to happen!" Konkov said. "We discussed it with our executive committee. We have our strong position and nothing could ever be changed.

"There are existing rules and regulations of UEFA and FIFA, and only according to these rules they can be punished. I cannot say what punishment I would like to see. I want to work according to rules and regulations. That's it."

The decision to add the three Crimean teams, who were dissolved, reconstituted and renamed as TSK Simferopol, SKChF Sevastopol and Zhemchuzhina Yalta, was taken in July. A meeting of the great and good of Russian football was held in Moscow to vote on the move. But an extraordinary recording of that meeting was leaked to Russian investigative magazine *Novaya Gazeta*.

The leading lights of Russian football discussed the move and fear for its consequences on their clubs and the 2018 World Cup. "I have a club to support," Evgeny Giner, the president of CSKA Moscow, is reported to have said. "And tomorrow they'll pull us from 2018. Why? Because a few wise people here, in the guise of presidents, ask us to put a

Food for thought...Russian president Putin sits side by side with Blatter at the World Cup

Another country...the empty Sevastopol Sports Complex cuts a sombre figure in a region torn apart by strife

tick for every 'for' or 'against'. And voila, sanctions."

As Western sanctions have been rolled out, several leading political figures in Germany and the UK have called for the World Cup to be taken away from Russia too. "We can probably survive without Europe," said Alexander Dyukov, president of Zenit, referring to any suspension from the Champions League. "But if we're talking about the World Cup, that's a political question."

Giner at one point even floated the possibility that the World Cup would go to England, who missed out on hosting the 2018 finals to Russia. "If that happens it won't be Nikolai [Tolstykh, head of the Russian Football Union] that Vladimir [Putin] goes looking for. It'll be those sitting here," he said.

Hollow gesture...Blatter with Ukraine federation president Konkov

> "My main hope right now is that war will stop. After that, I will think about the clubs"
>
> Ukraine Football Federation president, Anatoliy Konkov

Spelling it out...a fan of Lviv-based Karpaty makes her telling point

It is hard to see exactly what UEFA and FIFA can do right now other than punish Russia. By the letter of the law the federation should be suspended. But that would mean further isolating Russia and effectively barring its clubs' entry to the Champions League – where Russian gas giant Gazprom is a key sponsor – as well as the European Championship qualifiers.

Allowing the move without Ukraine's consent would be tacit approval of a political move that has been condemned around the world. In a statement UEFA declared that it would temporarily not recognise any results involving the three Crimean teams until further consultations, including advice from the UN. But in March the UN General Assembly passed a resolution upholding the territorial integrity of Ukraine, including Crimea, and that Russia's annexation "has no validity". UEFA hopes the two parties will come to an agreement, but that is naive at best.

Meanwhile, football continues in Ukraine. Some of the country's biggest clubs come from the east, including Shakhtar Donetsk. They have had to relocate to the stadiums of Kiev and Lviv, built for the 2012 European Championship. Those finals seem very far away today.

"It is vital for our politicians to understand what is really important," said Konkov. "What they [the rebels and Russians] are trying to divide, and which part of Ukraine they are trying to take.

"There is nothing more important than the life of a human being." WS

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Group C

51	Bayer Leverkusen
53	Benfica
64	Monaco
73	Zenit

Group D

43	Anderlecht
45	Arsenal
54	Borussia Dortmund
57	Galatasaray

Group E

52	Bayern Munich
56	CSKA Moscow
62	Manchester City
69	Roma

Group F

42	Ajax
44	APOEL
48	Barcelona
66	Paris Saint-Germain

Group G

55	Chelsea
63	Maribor
70	Schalke
72	Sporting Lisbon

Group H

46	Athletic Bilbao
50	BATE
67	Porto
71	Shakhtar Donetsk

Contributors: Klaas-Jan Droppert (Ajax), John Chapman (Anderlecht), Sid Lowe (Athletic Bilbao, Atletico Madrid, Barcelona, Real Madrid), Oleg Zadernovsky (BATE, Shakhtar Donetsk), Nick Bidwell (Bayern Munich, Bayer Leverkusen, Schalke), Tom Kundert (Benfica, Porto, Sporting), Victor Gusev (CSKA Moscow, Zenit) Paddy Agnew (Juventus, Roma), Rumen Paytashev (Ludogorets), Peterjon Cresswell (Maribor), Howard Johnson (Monaco, Paris Saint-Germain), Lou Economopoulos (Olympiakos)

2014-15

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Your essential guide to the group stage

AJAX

Former European giants revert to style of old

THE STADIUM

Amsterdam ArenA
Capacity 53,031
Built in 1996, it is one of Europe's five-star venues and is home of Holland's national team.

THE COACH

Frank DE BOER

Age 44 (15.05.70)
Clinched his fourth consecutive Dutch title last term. Will be loyal to the club philosophy of developing new talent.

TACTICS

Since De Boer took charge in November 2010 there has been nothing but success at domestic level, but his side has never made it to the second stage of the Champions League or the quarter-finals in the Europa League.

■ The former international defender has brought back the traditional 4-3-3 system with wingers and the values of Johan Cruyff, using the homegrown talent which gave Ajax their well- respected place in European football in the past.

■ However, a tough draw might see De Boer opt for more security at the back against Paris Saint-Germain and Barcelona.

■ Although skipper Siem De Jong, Holland star Daley Blind and veteran Christian Poulsen have gone, the good news is that Cillessen and Veltman gained valuable experience at the World Cup, while new talents such as El Ghazi and Krishna are knocking at the door.

Experience...Viergever protects the back line

■ EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS IN 1971, 1972, 1973 AND 1995

GOALKEEPERS

Diederik BOER
Age 33 (24.09.80)
Arrived on transfer deadline day after Vermeer left. A Dutch Cup winner last year with PEC Zwolle. Lost his little finger as a child.

Jasper CILLESSEN
Age 25 (22.04.89)
Calm and reliable, he took over from Kenneth Vermeer for both club and country, and was Holland's no1 at the World Cup.

DEFENDERS

Richedley BAZOER
Age 17 (12.10.96)
Central defender who was lured from the PSV youth academy. Of Antillian descent he is highly rated and seen as one for the future.

Nicolai BOILESEN (Den)
Age 22 (16.02.92)
Left-back who loves to get forward and join the attack, but whose career has been hampered by injury over the past couple of seasons.

Stefano DENSWIL
Age 21 (07.05.93)
Home-grown left-sided central defender. Known for his footballing qualities but inconsistency keeps him on the bench.

Ruben LIGEON
Age 22 (24.05.92)
Attacking right-back. Despite being a match for Van Rhijn, De Boer seems to prefer the international and often leaves Ligeon on the bench.

Niklas MOISANDER (Fin)
Age 28 (29.09.85)
Returned to the club in 2013. A valuable player in European competition, his build-up play is good, but he sometimes lacks concentration.

Jairo RIEDEWALD
Age 18 (09.09.96)
Attack-minded left-back who turned what looked like a 1-0 defeat into a 2-1 win against Roda by scoring on his debut twice within a few minutes.

Mike VAN DER HOORN
Age 21 (15.10.92)
Central defender who was signed from Utrecht on a four-year deal last year after representing Holland at the Euro Under-21s.

Ricardo VAN RHIJN
Age 23 (13.06.91)
Full-back who came up through the youth system and signed a three-year contract extension in July, taking him up to 2018.

Joel VELTMAN
Age 22 (15.01.92)
Home grown central defender who went to this summer's World Cup, having made his debut in November 2013 against Colombia.

MIDFIELDERS

Lucas ANDERSEN (Den)
Age 20 (13.09.94)
Can play in midfield or on either wing. Was signed in 2013 for €1.5m from Danish side AaB, where he made his debut aged 16.

Lerin DUARTE
Age 24 (11.08.90)
Of Cape Verdean descent he is a former Holland under-21 international and has been in the senior squad. Signed from Hercules last year for €2.5m.

Davy KLAASSEN
Age 21 (21.02.93)
Attacking midfielder who scored on his debut, against NEC in November 2011. Made his international debut against France in March.

Lasse SCHONE (Den)
Age 28 (27.05.86)
Playmaker who is one of the most experienced squad members. Dangerous at free-kicks. He can also play on the wing.

Thulani SERERO (SAf)
Age 24 (11.04.90)
Joined from South Africa's Ajax Cape Town. It is said he once pulled out of an international squad to stay fit ahead of a Champions League game.

Nick VIERGEVER
Age 25 (03.08.89)
Midfielder cum defender who came from AZ to replace Christian Poulsen. The ex-international brings experience to the team.

FORWARDS

Anwar EL GHAZI
Age 19 (03.05.95)
Lively right-winger who was once let go by Feyenoord. Was expected to play at the reserves, but is already often in the first team line-up.

Viktor FISCHER (Den)
Age 20 (09.06.94)
A left-winger whose grandfather, Poul Pedersen, played on the right flank and won a silver medal at the 1960 Summer Olympics.

Ricardo KISHNA
Age 19 (04.01.95)
Speedy left-winger whose goal is to join one of the European giants soon. Came through the ranks and scored on his debut against AZ last season.

Arkadiusz MILIK (Pol)
Age 20 (28.02.94)
Polish international who is on loan from Bayer Leverkusen. A centre-forward with ball control and footballing qualities to suit Ajax's positional play.

Robert MURIC (Cro)
Age 18 (12.03.96)
Winger from Dinamo Zagreb who didn't play at his old club after a contract dispute. Started this season with an injury.

Tobias SANA (Swe)
Age 25 (11.07.89)
Winger who was signed from Gothenburg. Eligible for either Burkina Faso or Sweden, he chose to represent the country of his birth.

Kolbeinn SIGHTHORSSON (Ice)
Age 24 (14.03.90)
Previously with HK of Kopavogur in Iceland and Dutch club AZ, he has seen his career disrupted by injury problems.

Plus: Richairo ZIVKOVIC (Age 17, 05.09.96)

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

ANDERLECHT

Last 16 would be an achievement

THE STADIUM

Constant Vanden Stock Stadium Capacity 21,845
A lack of atmosphere means a trip to Brussels holds little fear. There are plans to increase the capacity.

THE COACH

Besnik HASI (Alb)

Age 42 (25.12.71)
Took over in March and won the title with a good run in the play-offs. Well organised and passionate, he likes to give young players a chance.

TACTICS

Although they consistently reach the group stage, the loss of key players every summer means that they rarely go much deeper in the competition.

■ As a club, the remit is to play attractive football but this campaign will be difficult as the squad is young and inexperienced.

■ Tielemans is the team's main man in midfield despite his tender years. There is experience alongside him in the shape of Defour.

■ Mitrovic is beginning to justify the club record fee of €5m that was paid to Partizan Belgrade in August 2013. He is now scoring regularly in the league.

■ Away from home, Hasi could be tempted to switch to a 4-2-3-1. Such a tactical change would probably see Dendoncker coming in for Cyriac.

■ Suarez is a likely impact substitute, most likely coming off the bench to replace Cyriac.

Hype...Praet is yet to fulfil his potential

■ EUROPEAN SEMI-FINALISTS IN 1982 AND 1986

GROUP D Belgium

GOALKEEPERS

Silvio PROTO
Age 31 (23.05.83)
Outspoken but a great shot stopper. Missed the World Cup after breaking an arm in the final league match of last season.

Davy ROEF
Age 20 (06.02.94)
Former Belgium under-19 international, he made his Anderlecht debut in January, coming on as substitute for the injured Proto.

DEFENDERS

Maxime COLIN (Fra)
Age 22 (15.11.91)
Former France under-20 right-back who was signed from Troyes this season. Began his career with Boulogne.

Olivier DESCHACHT
Age 33 (16.02.81)
Left-back who is closing in on the club's appearance record, having won seven Belgian league titles in his 13 years with the club.

Michael HEYLEN
Age 20 (03.01.94)
Central defender who was diagnosed with Crohn's disease at the age of 16. Spent last season out on loan at Belgian side Kortrijk.

Herve MATTHYS
Age 18 (19.01.96)
Central defender who came up through the academy and signed his first pro contract this summer. Played in the UEFA Youth League last season.

Chancel MBEMBA (DRC)
Age 20 (08.08.94)
Full-back who gained notoriety last year when it transpired that he had used two different dates of birth when playing football in his home country.

Fabrice N'SAKALA (Fra)
Age 24 (21.07.90)
Former French under-21 full-back who has so far rejected the chance to play for DR Congo, for whom he is also eligible.

Bram NUYTINCK (Hol)
Age 24 (04.05.90)
Central defender who was capped by Holland at under-21 level. He joined Anderlecht from NEC in August 2012 for around €3m.

Anthony VANDEN BORRE
Age 26 (24.10.87)
Right-back who broke his right ankle during the World Cup. He was only playing in the game as first-choice Alderweireld was being

MIDFIELDERS

Steven DEFOUR
Age 26 (15.04.88)
Once of Standard Liege, he returned to Belgium after three seasons at Porto, where he won the Portuguese title twice.

Leander DENDONCKER
Age 19 (25.04.95)
Defensive midfielder who is a product of the club's youth academy. Made his league debut in August, in the team's second game of the season.

Plus: Samuel BASTIEN (Age 17, 26.09.96)

Sacha KLJESTAN (USA)
Age 28 (09.09.85)
Hard working midfielder who had been expected to join MLS side Los Angeles Galaxy on loan during the summer but remained in Belgium instead.

Andy NAJAR (Hon)
Age 21 (16.03.93)
Raised in the USA, the right-sided midfielder opted to play for the country of his birth after a long courtship. Was the MLS rookie of the year in 2010.

Dennis PRAET
Age 20 (14.05.94)
Attacking midfielder who played his 100th game for the club in August. Tipped for great things but has yet to live up to the hype.

Youri TIELEMANS
Age 17 (07.05.97)
Seen as the best player from the club's academy since Vincent Kompany, the dynamic central midfielder made his debut at 16.

Federico VICO (Spa)
Age 20 (04.07.94)
Signed last summer but failed to break into the first team and was loaned out to Oostende in January for the remainder of the campaign.

WIGOR (Bra)
Age 19 (07.01.95)
The club's first signing of the new season, he joined from Brazilian second division side Capivariano after a successful trial during the summer.

FORWARDS

Frank ACHEAMPONG (Gha)
Age 20 (16.10.93)
Quick, strong and a proven scorer, the winger has played for clubs on three different continents. Has captained Ghana's under-20 side.

CYRIAC (IVC)
Age 24 (05.08.90)
Was top scorer in the Ivorian League in 2008 but took time to settle down in Europe. Originally with Standard Liege before moving to Anderlecht.

Nathan KABASELE
Age 20 (14.01.94)
Skilful with plenty of tricks up his sleeve, he is looking to make his mark on the first team after spells out on loan in Italy and Holland.

Andy KAWAYA
Age 18 (23.08.96)
Highly rated left-winger who has been capped by Belgium at youth level, but could be tempted to represent DR Congo at senior level.

Aleksandar MITROVIC (Ser)
Age 20 (16.09.94)
Cost a club record fee of €5m when signed from Partizan Belgrade at the start of last season. Voted best player at the 2013 Euro Under-19s.

Matias SUAREZ (Arg)
Age 26 (09.05.88)
Central striker or winger, he missed most of last season with a knee problem. A move to CSKA Moscow previously fell through due to injury concerns.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

APOEL

Cypriot double-winners hoping to impress again

THE STADIUM

GSP Stadium
Capacity 22,859
Cyprus' largest stadium serves as the home for Nicosia clubs APOEL, Omonia and Olympiakos.

THE COACH

Giorgios DONIS

Age 44 (19.10.69)
Former Greece winger. Replaced the sacked Paulo Sergio last autumn and won the league and cup double in his first season.

TACTICS

APOEL, the Cypriot league and cup winners, are taking part in the group stage of the Champions League for the third time, after previous campaigns in 2009-10 and 2011-12. In 2012, they reached the quarter-finals after a penalty shootout victory over Lyon. Key midfielders Nuno Morais, Constantinos Charalambides and Manduca remain from that side, but the rest of the side has changed considerably.

■ APOEL are set up with two solid banks of four in defence and midfield, with a lone striker Cilian Sheridan supported by playmaker Tomas De Vincenti.

■ Sheridan and De Vincenti have formed a valuable partnership over the past six months, but the arrival of Algerian international Rafik Djebbour, a regular scorer in Greece before a disappointing spell in England at Nottingham Forest, presents coach Donis with a selection dilemma.

Happy days...Sheridan (no9) and Vinicius celebrate

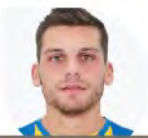
■ CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUARTER-FINALS IN 2012

Dionisis CHIOTIS (Gre) — GOALKEEPERS
Age 37 (04.06.77)
Member of the 2012 side and hero of the penalty shootout victory over Lyon, but since displaced as first choice by Pardo.

Urko PARDO (Blg)
Age 31 (28.01.83)
Born in Belgium to Spanish parents. Attended Barcelona's La Masia academy but never made it higher than the Barca B team.

Marios ANTONIADES — DEFENDERS
Age 24 (14.05.90)
Left-back or central defender who has come through the APOEL academy. Called up to the senior Cyprus squad in 2012.

CARLAO (Bra)
Age 28 (19.01.86)
Versatile Brazilian centre-back who joined APOEL this summer after six seasons as a regular with Sochaux in France, replacing Marcelo Oliveira.



Andreas CHRISTOFIDES
Age 21 (14.10.92)
Youth team product who spent last season on loan at Alki Larnaca. Returned to APOEL this summer and signed a one-year contract extension.

Joao GUILHERME (Bra)
Age 28 (21.04.86)
Centre-back who joined APOEL last season from Maritimo. Captain of the Brazil side that won the 2003 Under-17 world championship.

Nicholas IOANNOU
Age 18 (10.11.95)
Central defender who joined Manchester United aged 11 but was released this summer. Son of former national team captain Demetris Ioannou.

KAKA (Bra)
Age 33 (16.05.81)
Centre-back who was hit by a firecracker in last season's title decider with AEL, forcing the match to be abandoned. Not the former Real Madrid star.

Tasos PAPAZOGLOU (Gre)
Age 25 (24.09.88)
Centre-back and former Greek Under-21 international who joined APOEL this summer from Olympiakos.

Mario SERGIO (Por)
Age 33 (28.07.81)
Right-back and ex Portugal Under-21 international who joined APOEL in 2012 after four seasons with Metalurh Donetsk.

John Arne RIISE (Nor)
Age 33 (24.09.80)
Veteran left-back who left Fulham this summer after the club's relegation from the Premier League. Norway's most capped player.

Stathis ALONEFTIS — MIDFIELDERS
Age 31 (29.03.83)
Speedy left winger and regular for the Cyprus national side. Joined in 2012 having spent most of his career at Omonia Nicosia.

Kostakis ARTYMATAS
Age 21 (15.04.93)
Defensive midfielder who spent time at Nottingham Forest's academy before returning to Cyprus. Already a senior Cyprus international.

Constantinos CHARALAMBIDES
Age 33 (25.07.81)
Club captain and experienced Cypriot international who has spent the bulk of his career at APOEL. A valuable source of goals from midfield.

Georgios EFREM
Age 25 (05.07.89)
Winger who joined this summer from Omonia. Came through Arsenal's academy but never made the first team. A regular Cyprus international.

Tiago GOMES (Por)
Age 29 (18.08.85)
Former Portugal Under-21 midfielder who joined APOEL last year after a season in the English Championship with Blackpool.

Alex KONSTANTINOU
Age 22 (11.04.92)
Under-21 winger who joined APOEL this summer from Apollon. Started out at Northampton Town, but didn't make the first team.

Gustavo MANDUCA (Bra)
Age 34 (08.06.80)
Much-travelled winger who has been at APOEL since 2010. A key contributor to last season's league and cup double, scoring some important goals.

Plus: Nektarios ALEXANDRIOU (Age 30, 19.12.83)

Nuno MORAIS (Por)
Age 30 (29.01.84)
Defensive midfielder and former Chelsea trainee who has been a key figure at APOEL since 2007. Has also played in central defence.

VINICIUS (Bra)
Age 28 (16.05.86)
Attacking midfielder who joined APOEL last year after a nine-year spell in Portugal. Scored key goals in the Champions League qualifiers.

Tomas DE VINCENTI (Arg) — FORWARDS
Age 25 (09.02.89)
Struggled at Olympiakos but has formed a sparking partnership with Sheridan at APOEL since joining in early 2014.

Rafik DJEBBOUR (Alg)
Age 30 (08.03.84)
French-born Algerian international who impressed in Greece at AEK and Olympiakos, but failed to shine at Nottingham Forest last season.

Cilian SHERIDAN (RoI)
Age 25 (23.02.89)
Former Celtic striker who has been capped by the Republic of Ireland and had spell in Bulgaria with CSKA Sofia and joined APOEL last year.

Pieros SOTIRIOU
Age 21 (13.01.93)
Young striker or wideman who is already a regular in the Cypriot national squad. Mostly used as an impact sub by APOEL.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

ARSENAL

No strangers to the group stage

THE STADIUM

Emirates Stadium
Capacity 60,338
Sometimes lacking in atmosphere for domestic games, it does create a buzz on Champions League nights.

THE COACH

Arsene WENGER (Fra)

Age 64 (22.10.49)
Has led the Gunners to the group stages for a 17th consecutive season – a record that only Real Madrid can better.

TACTICS

With yet another Champions League campaign secured after narrowly getting past Besiktas, Wenger will be looking to top the group rather than just qualify for the knockout stages – reducing the chances of yet another early clash with Barcelona.

■ Wenger has an abundance of talented attacking midfielders at his disposal and this season's 4-3-3 formation is an attempt to fit as many of them as possible into the starting line-up.

■ Once again, the main doubts are centred around the need for a top-class holding midfielder and defensive cover.

■ Welbeck was signed after Giroud was ruled out until the new year following ankle surgery. Wenger could also use Sanchez through the middle.

■ The sale of Thomas Vermaelen has reduced options at the back, although Chambers proved a revelation at centre-back.

Swap...Sanchez could replace Giroud at centre-forward

■ CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RUNNERS-UP IN 2006

GROUP D + England

GOALKEEPERS

David OSPINA (Col)
Age 26 (31.08.88)
Signed on the back of some eye-catching displays at the World Cup. Will challenge for a starting spot when he is back to full fitness.

Wojciech SZCZESNY (Pol)
Age 24 (18.04.90)
His position seems to be under threat at the start of every new campaign but he impressed in both qualifiers against Besiktas.

Plus: Damian MARTINEZ (Arg, Age 21, 02.09.92)

DEFENDERS

Calum CHAMBERS
Age 19 (20.01.95)
Right-back who has impressed in central defence since arriving in the summer from Southampton, earning a call-up to the England squad.

Mathieu DEBUCHY (Fra)
Age 29 (29.07.85)
Has proved a more than capable replacement for the departed Bacary Sagna since his arrival from Newcastle United during the summer.

Kieran GIBBS
Age 24 (26.09.89)
The undoubted first choice at left-back, recent seasons have been blighted by a series of niggling injuries. When fit, he is a potent attacking threat.

Laurent KOSCIELNY (Fra)
Age 29 (10.09.85)
Has gone from strength to strength since arriving from Lorient in 2010. A commanding aerial presence at both ends of the pitch.`

Plus: Hector BELLERIN (Spa, Age 19, 09.03.95), **Isaac HAYDEN** (Age 19, 22.03.95)

MIDFIELDERS

Per MERTESACKER (Ger)
Age 29 (29.09.84)
The development of his central partnership with Koscielny has been so impressive that Arsenal could afford to let captain Thomas Vermaelen leave.

Nacho MONREAL (Spa)
Age 28 (26.02.86)
A more than capable deputy for Gibbs at left-back, the Spanish international was linked with a move back home to Athletic Bilbao.

Mikel ARTETA (Spa)
Age 32 (26.03.82)
A cultured performer who has adapted his game to a more disciplined role but sometimes struggles to break up the opposition play.

Santi CAZORLA (Spa)
Age 29 (13.12.84)
Often provides some of the team's most creative moments cutting in from the flanks. He is also the go-to man for attacking dead-ball situations.

Abou DIABY (Fra)
Age 28 (11.05.86)
Powerful and rangy box-to-box midfielder. He is highly rated by Wenger but rarely manages to get through a season without a serious injury.

Mathieu FLAMINI (Fra)
Age 30 (07.03.84)
Injected some much needed steel into the midfield since returning from Milan. His defensive protection could prove crucial in tight situations.

Plus: Francis COQUELIN (Fra, Age 23, 13.05.91), **Gedion ZELALEM** (Ger, Age 17, 26.01.97)

Serge GNABRY (Ger)
Age 19 (14.07.95)
Highly rated attacking midfielder who has been on the fringes of the first team for the past two seasons since making his debut as a 17-year-old.

Alex OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN
Age 21 (15.08.93)
Another Wenger signing from Southampton, he provides pace and skill right across the midfield and has a blistering shot with either foot.

Mesut OZIL (Ger)
Age 25 (15.10.88)
A World Cup winner who, despite his creativity and eye for a pass, is heavily reliant on the movement of others in order to flourish.

Aaron RAMSEY (Wal)
Age 23 (26.12.90)
Has firmly established himself at the heart of the midfield. His sending-off against Besiktas in the qualifying round was the first red card of his career.

Tomas ROSICKY (CzR)
Age 33 (04.10.80)
One of the Gunners' longest serving players, his work-rate and composure on the ball is a valuable asset, particularly in the closing stages of games.

Jack WILSHERE
Age 22 (01.01.92)
After criticism that he "doesn't look any better a player now than when he was 17", Wenger says he must become a "persistent presence" this term.

FORWARDS

Joel CAMPBELL (CR)
Age 22 (26.06.92)
Back after a season's loan at Olympiakos where he scored against Manchester United in last season's Champions League.

Lukas PODOLSKI (Ger)
Age 29 (04.06.85)
Provides goals and an attacking left-sided option for Germany but has struggled to replicate that form at club level and rarely lasts a full 90 minutes.

Alexis SANCHEZ (Chl)
Age 25 (19.12.88)
An attacking midfielder blessed with pace, close control and a good finish, he is likely to cover for the injured Giroud. Cost £35m from Barcelona.

Yaya SANOGO (Fra)
Age 21 (27.01.93)
A big, bustling centre-forward who can be a handful for opposing defenders. Wenger has great faith in him despite an unimpressive scoring record.

Theo WALCOTT
Age 25 (16.03.89)
Wenger has missed his pace since a serious knee injury in January. He will hope to have him back to full fitness for European campaign.

Danny WELBECK
Age 23 (26.11.90)
Centre-forward who can play anywhere across a front three. Signed on deadline day from Manchester United, who he had joined as a schoolboy.

Plus: Olivier GIROUD (Fra, Age 27, 30.09.86)

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

ATHLETIC BILBAO

Long awaited return to the top table

THE STADIUM

San Mames
Capacity 53,332
Opened in August, the new ground was built next door to the previous one – which was the oldest in Spain.

THE COACH

Ernesto VALVERDE

Age 50 (09.02.64)
Known as "*Txinguirri*" (the ant) as a player, he is a clever coach who is universally liked and was wanted by Barcelona.

TACTICS

Back in the Champions League for the first time in 15 years, the club that only fields Basques believe that they can cause a surprise this time – particularly at home, now that their new satdium is finished.

■ Like previous coach Marcelo Bielsa, Valverde likes his teams like to press high and attack whenever they can. Crosses and heading also remain a key part of their game.

■ The departure of Ander Herrera to Manchester United this summer has deprived Athletic of their most talented playmaker but Benat took on the role in the Champions League qualifiers, while teenager Lopez also made an impression as a substitute and could be an exciting long-term option.

■ Muniain provides plenty of spark on the flank and as an auxiliary striker, providing support to lone forward Aduriz, who was in terrific form in the qualifying round, scoring the crucial goals to see off Napoli.

Sixth season...Muniain is still only 21 years old

■ EUROPEAN CUP QUARTER-FINALISTS IN 1957

Iago HERRERIN
Age 26 (25.01.88)
Reserve goalkeeper and youth team product. Played 12 times last season, six in the league and six in the Spanish Cup.

Gorka IRAIZOZ
Age 33 (06.03.81)
Longtime incumbent who began the season by scoring a stunning 90th-minute header against Malaga only to have it ruled out.

GOALKEEPERS

Jon AURTENETXE
Age 21 (03.01.92)
Back after a spell with Celta. Former national champion in Greco-Roman wrestling. The early promise as an attacking left-back has yet to be

Mikel BALENZIAGA
Age 26 (29.02.88)
Left-back who started his career at rivals Real Sociedad and is now in his third different spell at Athletic. Likely to be first choice this season.

Carlos GUERPEGUI
Age 34 (19.08.80)
Club captain now in his 14th season. Successfully converted into accomplished central defender. Returning from injury now.

Andoni IRAOLA
Age 32 (22.06.82)
Twelfth season in the first team. For a while could have claimed to be the best full-back in La Liga. Technically very strong but less mobile now.

DEFENDERS

Aymeric LAPORTE (Fra)
Age 20 (27.05.94)
Hugely impressive last season, when he featured in 35 league games. A European Under-19 champion with France in 2011 and 2012.

Mikel SAN JOSE
Age 25 (30.05.89)
Named in Vicente Del Bosque's first Spain squad following the World Cup. Did not play in two years at Liverpool.

Ager AKETXE
Age 20 (30.12.93)
Creative player and another candidate to take the Herrera role. Talented and always prepared to run at defenders from the central position.

BENAT Extebarria
Age 27 (19.02.87)
Signed from Betis and seemed destined to be Athletic's main playmaker from central midfield but his game lacks the intensity required.

Unai BUSTINZA
Age 22 (02.02.92)
Captain of the B team and beginning his debut season in Valverde's first team. Can also play at centre-back or at right-back.

Oscar DE MARCOS
Age 25 (14.04.89)
During one late night radio interview, Iker Muniain declared "Oscar's out there doing laps of the pitch now", which said it all. Dynamic and tireless.

MIDFIELDERS

Ibai GOMEZ
Age 24 (11.11.89)
Left-footed attacker or midfielder who played often in Marcelo Bielsa's final season but was called upon less often by Valverde.

Ander ITURRASPE
Age 25 (08.03.89)
Tidy central midfielder who is likely to play a bigger role in the future and was included in Spain's first post World Cup squad.

Unai LOPEZ
Age 18 (30.10.95)
Made his debut in the second leg of the qualifier against Napoli and impressed. May prove to be the replacement for Ander Herrera.

Erik MORAN
Age 23 (25.05.91)
Central midfielder who has played 15 first-team appearances for Athletic since making his debut, while still a B team player, in April 2013.

Iker MUNIAIN
Age 21 (19.12.92)
Feisty, skillful, mobile attacking talent who team mates call Bart Simpson. This is his sixth season in the first team despite his age.

Mikel RICO
Age 29 (04.11.84)
Finally joined Athletic last season 13 years after making his professional debut at Basconia, the first of five clubs he has played for.

Inigo RUIZ DE GALARRETA
Age 21 (06.08.93)
Back at Athletic after a season in the second division with Mirandes, who were relegated then reinstated as Murcia went down for financial reasons.

Markel SUSAETA
Age 26 (14.12.87)
Reliable, talented, two footed and able to play on either side of the forward line. Has missed just two league games in three seasons.

Artiz ADURIZ
Age 33 (11.02.81)
Star of the Napoli qualifier with two goals. Scored 16 in La Liga last season. Clever movement, high work rate and excellent in the air.

GUILLERMO
Age 21 (23.05.93)
Free-scoring talent who came up through the ranks. Played most of last season in the B team, but also made nine first-team appearances.

Gaizka TORQUERO
Age 30 (09.08.84)
Striker who wears the number 2 and never stops running but admits that he is not the most talented footballer around. A cult idol with fans.

Borja VIGUEIRA
Age 27 (26.03.87)
Former Bilbao B team player signed from Alaves in the summer, where he scored 42 league goals over the last two seasons.

FORWARDS

Plus: Kike SOLA (Age 28, 25.02.86)

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

ATLETICO MADRID

All change for last year's finalists

THE STADIUM

Vicente Calderon Stadium
Capacity 54,907
Down on the banks of the Manzanares river, few stadiums make as much noise as the Calderon.

THE COACH

Diego SIMEONE (Arg)

Age 44 (28.04.70)
The man who instilled a winning mentality into Atletico. Has anyone ever transformed a club so quickly and so completely?

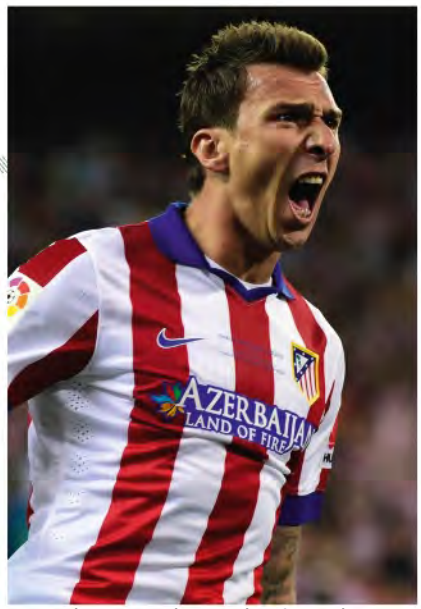
TACTICS

La Liga champions last term for the first time in 18 years, the first team to break up the Barca-Real duopoly in a decade, and Champions League finalists. Another Final appears unlikely, but then so did it last year...

■ Simeone's summer signings suggest a slight evolution in a style that was already shifting towards the end of last season. They will, however, be defensively tough and extremely well-organised once more.

■ Replacing Diego Costa will not be easy but fans are excited about the signing of Mandzukic.

■ Those supporters, however, will have to wait a bit longer to see another potential new goalscorer in Angel Correa. The 19-year-old was due to join the club from San Lorenzo of Argentina in the summer but has had to undergo surgery to correct a heart condition. The deal for the highly rated teenager is still expected to go through once he has been given the medical all clear.



Mandzukic...the latest in a long line of top strikers

EUROPEAN FINALISTS IN 1974 AND 2014

GOALKEEPERS

Miguel ANGEL MOYA
Age 30 (02.04.84)
Underwent knee surgery in March before joining Atletico from Madrid neighbours Getafe during the summer.

Jan OBLAK (Sln)
Age 21 (07.01.93)
Won the Portuguese treble and reached the Europa League Final with Benfica last season. Made his professional debut in Slovenia at 16.

DEFENDERS

Cristian ANSALDI (Arg)
Age 27 (20.09.86)
Left-back on loan from Zenit, he can also play on the opposite flank and offers strength and athleticism when driving forward.

Jesus GAMEZ
Age 29 (10.04.85)
Experienced right-back who joined on a three-year deal from Malaga in the summer, having spent nine seasons on the Costa del Sol.

Jose GIMENEZ (Uru)
Age 19 (20.01.95)
Central defender whose superb displays in last year's World Youth Cup saw him go to Brazil this summer, where he played against England.

Diego GODIN (Uru)
Age 28 (16.02.86)
Tough central defender who scored the goal that won La Liga as well as the one that, for so long, seemed set to win the Champions League.

Emiliano INSUA (Arg)
Age 25 (07.01.89)
Left-back, he has a European passport due to his Spanish grandparents but was capped by Argentina. Had spells with Liverpool and Galatasaray.

JUANFRAN
Age 29 (09.01.85)
Right-back who started his career as a midfielder with Real Madrid. Has been a mainstay of the side since joining from Osasuna in 2011.

Joao MIRANDA (Bra)
Age 30 (07.09.84)
The central defender scored the winner in last season's 2-1 Copa del Rey triumph over Real Madrid. Was on standby for Brazil's World Cup squad.

Guilherme SIQUEIRA
Age 28 (28.04.86)
Left-back who returned to the club this summer after a season out on loan with Benfica, where he won the Portuguese treble.

MIDFIELDERS

ARDA Turan (Tur)
Age 27 (30.01.87)
The team's main creative force, he is the first Turkish-born player to win La Liga. Was appointed captain of Galatasaray at 21.

Alessio CERCI (Ita)
Age 27 (23.07.87)
Left-footer who likes to play on the right flank and cut in onto his stronger foot. Has also been used as a second striker. Joined from Torino in September.

GABI
Age 31 (10.07.83)
Captain, youth product and very much the heartbeat of the team. Now in his seventh season with the club, he signed a new deal in the summer.

Raul GARCIA
Age 28 (11.07.86)
Strong in the air and a clever finisher, he has played more European Cup/Champions League games for Atletico than any player in the club's history.

Antoine GRIEZMANN (Fra)
Age 23 (21.03.91)
Offers pace going forward and, having been signed from Real Sociedad for €30m, he is the club's second-most expensive signing, after Radamel Falcao.

KOKE
Age 22 (08.01.92)
Jorge Resurreccion Merodio came up through the youth ranks and was a European Under-21 Championship winner with Spain last year.

Cristian RODRIGUEZ (Uru)
Age 28 (30.09.85)
Stocky left-winger who has great control in tight spaces. Used mostly from the bench as an impact sub these days, his nickname is "*Cebolla*" (onion).

SAUL Niguez
Age 19 (21.11.94)
Promising defensive midfielder who has returned to the club after a season-long loan with Rayo Vallecano. Capped by Spain at every youth level.

Mario SUAREZ
Age 27 (24.01.87)
Defensive midfielder who came through the Atletico youth ranks but then moved to Mallorca before returning to the club in 2010.

TIAGO Mendes (Por)
Age 33 (02.04.81)
Has won top-flight honours in England, France and Spain, and also won the Europa League, the UEFA Super Cup and the Spanish Cup.

FORWARDS

Hector HERNANDEZ
Age 19 (14.09.95)
Scored on his first-team debut, against Sant Andre in December 2013, and made his first La Liga appearance in August, at Rayo Vallecano.

Raul JIMENEZ (Mex)
Age 23 (05.05.91)
Good in the air, holds the ball up well and has a great shot. Signed from Club America for $14m in August. Won a gold medal at the 2012 Olympics.

Mario MANDZUKIC (Cro)
Age 25 (21.05.86)
Scored Bayern Munich's opening goal in their 2013 Champions League Final victory. Was joint-top scorer at Euro 2012.

Momar NDOYE (Sen)
Age 22 (10.03.92)
A product of the Atletico youth set-up, having moved to Spain in 2007 from his west African homeland. His progress has been hampered by injuries.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

BARCELONA

Enrique to usher in a new era

THE STADIUM

Camp Nou
Capacity 99,354
The biggest ground in Europe and the fifth-largest football arena in the world in terms of capacity.

THE COACH

Luis ENRIQUE

Age 44 (08.05.70)
Left Real Madrid for Barca as a player and always felt more at home in Catalunya. Competes in iron-man competitions and triathlons.

TACTICS

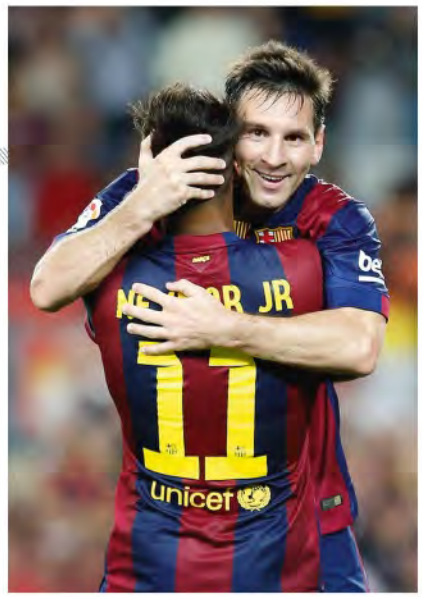
After just one season under Gerardo Martino, the *Blaugrana* start again under former B team boss Enrique, who arrives from Celta Vigo.

■ This season could see the biggest shift in Barcelona's style for seven or eight years. Enrique says that he wants to be "faithful" to the club's "identity" but he also wants his team to be "less predictable".

■ Victor Valdes and Carles Puyol have gone, so the new coach has brought in Ter Stegen and Bravo to contest the keeper's spot, while Vermaelen and Mathieu give options in defence.

■ Xavi, the player who most epitomised the club's style of seasons past, is likely to play a reduced role, with Mascherano adding bite to the midfield.

■ Messi may play a deeper, more creative role in order to accomodate Suarez and Neymar, although Suarez misses the first three Champions League games because of suspension.



Two of the best...Messi and team-mate Neymar

■ EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS IN 1992, 2006, 2009 AND 2011

Claudio BRAVO (Chl)
Age 31 (13.04.83)
Played in the Champions League last season for Real Sociedad. Once scored from a free-kick in a Spanish league game.

Jordi MASIP
Age 25 (03.01.89)
Graduate of the famed La Masia academy, which he joined at the age of 15. Not the tallest of keepers, but agile with good reflexes.

Marc-Andre TER STEGEN (Ger)
Age 22 (30.04.92)
The club hope he will have the style and personality to replace Victor Valdes, who has left after a decade between the posts.

GOALKEEPERS

ADRIANO (Bra)
Age 29 (26.10.84)
Quick, reliable and versatile, he can play in defence or midfield, on either flank, but is injury prone. Won the UEFA Cup twice with Sevilla.

Jordi ALBA
Age 25 (21.03.89)
Lightning quick, he began his career at Camp Nou, playing up front, but was converted into a left-back at Valencia. Returned to Barca in 2012.

Dani ALVES (Bra)
Age 31 (06.05.83)
Not the force he wants was, but still a potent attacking outlet from right-back. Defensive duties have never been the strongest part of his game.

DEFENDERS

Marc BARTRA
Age 23 (15.01.91)
Central defender who has been with the club since the age of 11. His 30 appearances last season were his most yet. Capped by Spain last year.

Jeremy MATHIEU (Fra)
Age 30 (29.10.83)
The first centre-half signed by Barca for five years, he can also play left-back. Is a smoker, despite former club Valencia's attempts to get him to give up.

Martin MONTOYA
Age 23 (14.04.91)
Right-back who went to La Masia at the age of eight. Last season was his second with the first-team squad but he found chances limited.

Gerard PIQUE
Age 27 (02.02.87)
A vital component of the back four whose influence will be more important than ever following the departure of Carles Puyol.

Thomas VERMAELEN (Blg)
Age 28 (14.11.85)
Central defender who has also played at left-back. Only the second Belgian to play for Barca, after Fernand Goyvaerts in the 1960s.

Sergio BUSQUETS
Age 26 (16.07.88)
Defensive midfielder who is tactically astute but has a reputation for making a meal of fouls. Son of ex-Barca keeper Carlos Busquets.

MIDFIELDERS

Alen HALILOVIC (Cro)
Age 18 (18.06.96)
Attacking midfielder who is the second-youngest player to appear in the Champions League, for Dinamo Zagreb aged 16 years and 128 days.

Andres INIESTA
Age 30 (11.05.84)
Shy off the pitch but comes alive on it, with his ability to beat opponents and find a pass. Scored the winning goal in the 2010 World Cup Final.

Javier MASCHERANO (Arg)
Age 30 (08.06.84)
Now back in central midfield after being deployed as a centre-half, he made more tackles than any other player at the summer's World Cup.

RAFINHA (Bra)
Age 21 (12.03.93)
Attacking midfielder who won youth caps for Spain before switching to Brazil last year. His brother Thiago Alcantara plays for Bayern Munich.

Ivan RAKITIC (Cro)
Age 26 (10.03.88)
Swiss-born playmaker who likes to dictate from deep. Was captain of the Sevilla side that won the Europa League last season.

Sergi ROBERTO
Age 22 (07.02.92)
Promoted to the senior squad in 2013 after impressing for Enrique's Barca B side. Well thought of but has struggled to break into the first team.

XAVI
Age 34 (25.01.80)
With his unrivalled ability to set the pace with short, sharp passes, he epitomised the club's style of old. Now likely to play a reduced role.

Munir EL HADDADI
Age 19 (01.09.95)
Quick, skilful and born in Madrid, he joined Barca at 11 and scored on his debut, against Elche on the opening weekend of La Liga.

Lionel MESSI (Arg)
Age 27 (24.06.87)
Four-time world player of the year. Did not have the greatest season by his own high standards last term; more will be expected this year.

NEYMAR (Bra)
Age 22 (05.02.92)
Often starts out on the left, but will drift inside and can play centrally or drop deep. Third-top scorer at the World Cup despite all the pressure.

PEDRO Rodriguez
Age 27 (28.07.87)
Quick and determined with an eye for goal, he is equally comfortable with either foot. Has spent his entire career with Barcelona.

Luis SUAREZ (Uru)
Age 27 (24.01.87)
Club's record signing at €81m, he will bring goals and a different character to Barca. Suspended for first three Champions League games.

FORWARDS

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

BASLE

Domestic dominance and last 16 are the aim

THE STADIUM

St Jakob Park
Capacity 37,500
Nicknamed "Joggeli" by the locals and built on the site of the club's former ground. Was opened in 2001.

THE COACH

Paulo SOUSA (Por)

Age 44 (30.08.70)
Won the Champions League twice as a player but still an unknown quantity as a coach. Joined from Maccabi Tel Aviv in the summer.

TACTICS

Swiss champions for the last five seasons, they have developed an uncanny knack for selling their top players each summer but managing to replenish the squad and stay competitive. Their aim, as always, will be to retain their league title and reach the knockout stage of the Champions League.

■ For the past few years they have successfully adopted the tactic of focusing all their energies on the Champions League and then making up lost ground in the Swiss league in the second half of the season.

■ Diaz plays a key role in front of the defence, while Streller operates as a target man.

■ Argentinian veteran Samuel, who was a Champions League winner with Internazionale in 2010, has been added for his experience and dressing-room presence.

■ Vaclik replaces Yann Sommer who joined Germany's Borussia Monchengladbach in the summer.

Key...Diaz has an important role in front of the back four

■ EUROPEAN CUP QUARTER-FINALISTS IN 1974

GROUP B ✚ Switzerland

GOALKEEPERS

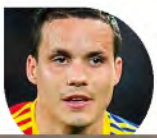
Tomas VACLIK (CzR)
Age 25 (29.03.89)
Left Czech champions Sparta Prague this summer to replace international Yann Sommer at the Swiss champions.

Germani VAILATI
Age 34 (30.08.80)
Now with his seventh Swiss side but has only played a couple of games for Basle. Called up by Switzerland but never capped.

DEFENDERS

Arlind AJETI
Age 20 (25.09.93)
His younger twin brothers are also on the club's books. Born in Basle of Albanian descent, he is a Swiss under-21 international.

Naser ALIJI
Age 20 (27.12.93)
Left Macedonia with his mother at the age of four to join his father who was working in Basle. Made his Swiss league debut in March.



Philipp DEGEN
Age 31 (15.02.83)
Right-back who can also operate in midfield, he returned to the club in 2011 after spells with Borussia Dortmund and Liverpool.

Behrang SAFARI (Swe)
Age 29 (09.02.85)
Plays on the left flank and is a Swedish international, having emigrated there from his homeland, Iran, when he was aged two.

Plus: Pascal ALBRECHT (Age 19, 29.04.95)

Walter SAMUEL (Arg)
Age 36 (23.03.78)
Former Internazionale central defender who was enticed to Switzerland this summer by the promise of a quiet lifestyle and Champions League football.

Gaston SAURO (Arg)
Age 24 (23.02.90)
Central defender who was signed by Basle in 2012 from Boca Juniors, where he made only a handful of first-team appearances.

Fabian SCHAR
Age 22 (20.12.91)
Sought-after central defender who is in the last year of his contract with Basle. Worked in a bank while playing with Wil in the Swiss second tier aged 17.

Marek SUCHY (CzR)
Age 26 (29.03.88)
Centre-back or midfielder. On loan from Spartak Moscow for the second half of last season, signing permanently in the summer.

MIDFIELDERS

Davide CALLA
Age 30 (10.02.84)
Of Italian descent, he joined Basle from Aarau in February as part of a swap deal. Had previously spent four years with Grasshoppers.

Matias DELGADO (Arg)
Age 31 (15.12.82)
Attacking midfielder who has now won three Swiss league titles in two spells with Basle, plus championships in Turkey and the UAE.

Marcelo DIAZ (Chl)
Age 27 (30.12.86)
Versatile performer with an astute eye for a pass who boosted his reputation with his performances at the World Cup this summer.

Serey DIE (IvC)
Age 29 (07.11.84)
Banned for eight games in 2012 for slapping a ball boy. Cried at the World Cup, but not because his father had died as was reported at the time.

Mohamed ELNENY (Egy)
Age 22 (11.07.92)
Winger with considerable potential who has a contract with the club until June 2018. Played at the 2012 Olympics in London.

Breel EMBOLO
Age 17 (14.02.97)
Can also play as a striker. Born in Cameroon but capped at youth level by the Swiss. Made his Basle debut in March, in a Europa League game.

Fabian FREI
Age 25 (08.01.89)
Central midfielder and Switzerland international who is no relation to former club and country team-mate Alexander Frei.

Shkelzon GASHI (Alb)
Age 26 (15.07.88)
Attacking midfielder who was the Swiss Super League's top scorer last term with 19 goals for Grasshoppers. Capped by Albania but born in Zurich.

Derlis GONZALEZ (Par)
Age 20 (23.03.94)
Signed in May from Benfica, although he never played for the Portuguese side and had two loan spells back home in Paraguay.

Taulant XHAKA (Alb)
Age 23 (28.03.91)
Born in Kosovo, but while his older brother, Granit, played for Switzerland at the World Cup he has opted to represent Albania at international level.

Luca ZUFFI
Age 24 (27.03.90)
The son of former Basle and Switzerland midfielder Dario Zuffi, he joined the club this summer from Winterthur after a loan spell at Thun.

FORWARDS

Yoichiro KAKITANI (Jap)
Age 24 (03.01.90)
Signed after the World Cup from Cerezo Osaka, where he had been since the age of four and was the youngest first-teamer at the age of 16.

Giovanni SIO (IvC)
Age 25 (31.03.89)
Capped by France up to under-18 level before switching allegiance. Has also played in Spain, Germany and France, where he was born.

Marco STRELLER
Age 33 (18.06.81)
Lanky centre-forward who possesses surprisingly nimble footwork. He is now in the eighth season of his second stint at the club.

Plus: Albian AJETI (Age 17, 26.02.97)

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

BATE

A team that has nothing to lose

THE STADIUM

Borisov Arena
Capacity 13,126
BATE moved into their brand new stadium earlier this year. The first game staged here was the Cup Final.

THE COACH

Alyaksandr YERMAKOVICH
Age 39 (21.01.75)
Former midfielder with the club who made the step up from assistant coach to take the head role in October 2013.

TACTICS

The dominant club in Belarus since 2006, they have won the last eight Belarus Supreme League titles and beat Skenderbeu Korce of Albania, Hungary's Debrecen and Slovan Bratislava of Slovakia to qualify for the group phase.

■ A lack of experience at the highest level, plus the high risk of individual errors, is a dangerous mix for Yermakovich's side. On the other hand, they have nothing to lose, even against much stronger sides.

■ Despite their domestic domination, the coach reinforced his squad during the summer with the arrival of promising goalkeeper Chernik, free agent Mladenovic and useful forward Gordeichuk.

■ Filipenko's intensity and positional awareness will be needed to keep things tight at the back, while Likhtarovich will look to drive at opposition defences and provide the ammunition for Rodionov.

Holding role...midfield battler Aleksandr Volodko

■ CHAMPIONS LEAGUE GROUP STAGE 2008–09, 2011–12, 2012–13 AND THIS SEASON

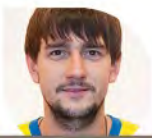
GOALKEEPERS

Sergei CHERNIK
Age 26 (20.07.88)
Signed this summer from Neman Grodno. Named as the best goalkeeper in the Belarus Supreme League in 2013.

Germans MALINS (Lat)
Age 26 (12.10.87)
A graduate of the Skonto academy in Latvia, he won the Latvian championship and Latvia Cup with the club in 2012.

Artem SOROKO
Age 22 (01.04.92)
Former Belarus under-21 international who is currently behind Chernik and Malins in the pecking order for a spot between the posts.

DEFENDERS



Egor FILIPENKO
Age 26 (10.04.88)
Central defender with good positional sense and a strong shot. Back at BATE after a disappointing spell with Spartak Moscow.

Vitali GAYDUCHIK
Age 25 (12.07.89)
Captained Dinamo Brest in the 2012 season and joined BATE the following year. Bronze medal winner in the 2011 Euro Under-21 Championship.

Anri KHAGUSH (Rus)
Age 27 (23.09.86)
Began at Spartak Moscow and joined BATE in 2006. Had spells on loan at six clubs before he returned once more to Borisov in 2014.

Filip MLADENOVIC (Ser)
Age 23 (15.08.91)
Full-back who moved to BATE as a free agent this year after two seasons playing in his homeland for Red Star Belgrade.

Denis POLYAKOV
Age 23 (17.04.91)
Central or right-sided defender who moved to BATE from Shakhtyor Soligorsk in 2012 after impressive performances for the Belarus under-21 team.

Nemanja TUBIC (Ser)
Age 30 (08.04.84)
Tall, powerful defender who began his career at Partizan Belgrade. Played for Genk in Belgium and joined BATE in 2014 from Krasnodar.

Yevgeniy YABLONSKY
Age 19 (10.05.95)
Promising defender who is a graduate of the Smena football academy. He is a current Belarus under-21 international.

MIDFIELDERS

Ilya ALEKSIEVICH
Age 23 (10.02.91)
Promising attacking midfielder who was recruited by BATE in 2013 after two prodigious seasons with Torpedo Belaz.

Dmitri BAGA
Age 24 (04.01.90)
Has been with BATE for the past seven years. Scored the first goal for Belarus at the Olympic Games in London in 2012.

Aleksandr KARNITSKI
Age 25 (14.02.89)
Holding midfielder who is fearless in the tackle. Joined BATE in 2014 after an impressive 2013 season with Gomel.

Dmitri LIKHTAROVICH
Age 36 (01.03.78)
The most experienced member of the squad and current captain. Has been with BATE since 2002, playing more than 300 games for the club.

Edgar OLEKHNOVICH
Age 27 (17.05.87)
Signed by BATE in 2009 from Dinamo Brest. Made his debut for the senior national team in March 2013 as a substitute against Jordan.

Aleksandr PAVLOV
Age 30 (18.08.84)
Experienced utility midfielder who joined BATE in 2009 from Dnepr Mogilev. Capped at senior international level by Belarus.

Aleksandr VOLODKO
Age 28 (08.06.86)
Holding midfielder who is a natural battler. Signed by BATE in 2008 from Dinamo Brest. Current Belarus international.

Maksim VOLODKO
Age 21 (10.11.92)
Joined BATE in 2009 and was the revelation of the Belarus Supreme League last year. Is a current member of the Belarus under-21 team.

Andriy YAKOVLEV (Ukr)
Age 25 (20.02.89)
Began his career with Shakhtar Donetsk, starting out in their youth academy. Signed by BATE in 2014 from Belarusian side Slutsk.

FORWARDS

Mikhail GORDEICHUK
Age 24 (23.10.89)
Joined BATE in 2011 from Naftan. Played for Belarus at the Olympic Games in London in 2012 and is a current senior international.

Dmitri MOZOLEVSKY
Age 29 (30.04.85)
Signed by BATE in 2011 from Dinamo Brest. A former under-21 international, he has won three caps for the senior side.

Aleksei PETRENKO
Age 19 (03.03.95)
A graduate of BATE's youth academy who is now on the periphery of the club's first-team squad and waiting for a chance to make his mark.

Vitali RODIONOV
Age 30 (11.12.83)
Talented and prolific striker who played for Freiburg of Germany in 2009. A current Belarus international with over 45 caps to his name.

Mikalay SIGNEVICH
Age 22 (20.02.92)
Tall and powerful striker who, at over 6ft 4in, is a handful in the air at set-pieces. He was signed by BATE in 2013 from Dinamo Brest.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

BAYER LEVERKUSEN

Proud record at this level

THE STADIUM

BayArena
Capacity 29,5000
While certainly no cauldron of intimidating emotion, the stadium can still rock on European nights.

THE COACH

Roger SCHMIDT (Aut)

Age 47 (13.03.67)
Never got higher than the third tier as a player, but has built a reputation as a coach who is a fine training-ground teacher and man-manager.

TACTICS

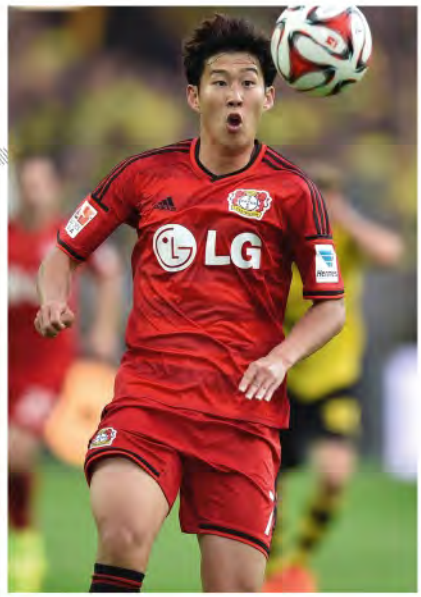
The Bayer-funded Leverkusener are treated somewhat sniffily by fans of "real" clubs, but they have a proud Champions League record and are in the group stage of the competition for a ninth time.

■ Schmidt is a smart, analytical coach who is a confirmed devotee of attacking adventure.

■ After many years as an essentially counter-attacking force, the Leverkusen hierarchy turned to Schmidt and his ideals.

■ Playing quick, aggressive and attractive football, he will set his side up in a fluid 4-2-2-2, with the whole team expected to press in unison when the opposition are in possession.

■ The team have made a habit of starting quickly this season, scoring the fastest goal in Bundesliga history on the opening weekend of the domestic campaign, and going ahead in their 4-0 thrashing of Copenhagen in the qualifiers through Son after just two minutes.



Early goal...Son was on target against Copenhagen

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RUNNERS-UP IN 2002

GROUP C Germany

GOALKEEPERS

Dario KRESIC (Cro)

Age 30 (11.01.84)
Croatia international who was signed on a free from Mainz at the end of last season. Has also played Greece and Russia.

Bernd LENO

Age 22 (04.03.92)
Now on the fringes of the national side, he was playing third-tier football for Stuttgart reserves when he first joined Leverkusen on loan in 2011.

Plus: David YELLDELL (USA, Age 32, 01.10.81)

DEFENDERS

Sebastian BOENISCH (Pol)

Age 27 (01.02.87)
Combative left-back who grew up in Germany and was capped at under-21 level before switching allegiance to the country of his birth.

Giulio DONATI (Ita)

Age 24 (05.02.90)
Defensively-minded right-back who was capped by Italy at under-21 level before joining Leverkusen from Inter for €2.25m in June 2013.

Roberto HILBERT

Age 29 (16.10.84)
Right-back who won the Bundesliga with Stuttgart in 2007 before a spell in Turkey with Besiktas. Won eight caps for the national side.

Tin JEDVAJ (Cro)

Age 18 (28.11.95)
An uncompromising marker who is on loan from Roma. His positioning is excellent but his self-assurance is such that some take it as arrogance.

Kyriakos PAPADOPOULOS (Gre)

Age 22 (23.02.92)
Feisty and single-minded centre-back who has a habit of picking up injuries. Currently on a season-long loan from Schalke.

Emir SPAHIC (Bos)

Age 34 (18.08.80)
Uncompromising central defender who captained his country at the summer's World Cup but has now quit international football.

Omer TOPRAK (Tur)

Age 25 (21.07.89)
Centre-half who was part of the Germany squad that won the Euro Under-19 title in 2008 before playing for the country of his parents.

WENDELL (Bra)

Age 21 (20.07.93)
Under-20 left-back who more than compensates for his slight build with his brilliance going forward, determination and desire.

Philipp WOLLSCHEID

Age 25 (06.03.89)
Imposing 6ft 3in central defender who is strong in the tackle and has been capped at senior level by Germany. Signed in 2012.

MIDFIELDERS

Karim BELLARABI

Age 24 (08.04.90)
Fast and elusive winger with Moroccan roots but was capped by Germany at under-21 level. On loan at Braunschweig last term.

Lars BENDER

Age 25 (27.04.89)
The twin brother of Dortmund's Sven, he is hard working and tactically astute. Can also slot in at right-back as well as defensive midfield.

Julian BRANDT

Age 18 (02.05.96)
A goalscoring winger or attacking midfielder who was snatched from Wolfsburg this year and is one of the best young players in Germany.

Hakan CALHANOGLU (Tur)

Age 20 (08.02.94)
Playmaker who is a set-piece specialist, the scorer of sensational goals and never short of an unexpected trick. Cost €14.5m from Hamburg.

Gonzalo CASTRO

Age 27 (11.06.87)
Does his most productive work when pushing forward from the middle of the park. Can also be relied upon to deputise at full-back if requred.

Robbie KRUSE (Aus)

Age 25 (05.10.88)
Versatile performer who missed the World Cup after a cruciate ligament injury. His early career was blighted by off-the-field incidents.

Levin OZTUNALI

Age 18 (15.03.96)
The grandson of all-time great, Uwe Seeler, his own technique and vision have been good enough to see him represent Germany at youth level.

Stefan REINARTZ

Age 25 (01.01.89)
Uncomplicated and effective midfield holder who underwent surgery at the end of last season for a compressed nerve in his heel.

Simon ROLFES

Age 32 (21.01.82)
The club captain will take on the defensive responsibilities in midfield. A strong character who has fought back when on the verge of losing his place.

Vladen YURCHENKO (Ukr)

Age 20 (02.01.94)
Creative midfielder who was headhunted in the close season from Shakhtar Donetsk. A free-kick expert, he cost only €255,000.

FORWARDS

Josip DRMIC (Swi)

Age 22 (08.08.92)
Of Croat lineage, he is hot property after 17 goals for relegated Nuremberg last season. Signed in the summer for €6.2m.

Stefan KIESSLING

Age 30 (25.01.84)
A constant source of goals since arriving from Nuremberg in 2006, he will benefit from Schmidt's no-holds barred attacking approach.

SON Heung-Min (SKo)

Age 22 (08.07.92)
Became the club's most expensive signing when he arrived from Hamburg for €10m last year to replace Andre Schurrle.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

BAYERN MUNICH

Driven on by last season's defeat

THE STADIUM

Allianz Arena
Capacity 68,000
Situated in north Munich, the arena was opened in 2005 and is both stylish and atmospheric.

THE COACH

Pep GUARDIOLA (Spa)
Age 43 (18.01.71)
The suave, intellectual outer shell of the Catalan hides a steely determination, a flair for leadership and perfectionist instincts.

TACTICS

After last season's 4-0 loss to Real Madrid in the semi-final, second leg at the Allianz Arena – their worst-ever home defeat in Europe – the need for swift redemption is acute.

■ Despite the Real Madrid fiasco in April, Guardiola will remain true to his commandments of high pressing, slick short-passing, patient possession and maximum movement off the ball.

■ The introduction of a 3-4-3 system, in place of last season's 4-1-4-1/4-2-3-1 formation will give the side more flexibility.

■ Lewandowski's arrival offers Guardiola that most important feature for a centre-forward in his set-up: mobility.

■ Javi Martinez will miss all of the group stage after he suffered cruciate-knee-ligament damage in the German Super Cup.

■ There are two key areas Bayern need to work on: defending from set-pieces and their organisation when they lose the ball.

Bonus...Lewandowski will add mobility to the side

■ EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS IN 1974, 1975, 1976, 2001 AND 2013

GROUP E

Germany

GOALKEEPERS

Manuel NEUER
Age 28 (27.03.86)
German footballer of the year, the world's foremost "sweeper-keeper" is equally happy mopping up as he is initiating attacks.

Pepe REINA (Spa)
Age 32 (31.08.82)
Signed from Liverpool as back-up for Neuer, having spent last season on loan at Napoli. Has a good record of saving penalties.

Plus: Tom STARKE (Age 33, 18.03.81)

DEFENDERS

David ALABA (Aut)
Age 22 (24.06.92)
Extremely versatile, he began as a winger, playing on either flank, before moving to left-back. Has also appeared in central midfield for Austria.

Holger BADSTUBER
Age 25 (13.03.89)
Central defender who returned to action at the start of this season after a damaging cruciate ligaments in his right knee 18 months earlier.

Mehdi BENATIA (Mor)
Age 27 (17.04.87)
Signed from Roma for €30m in August, he is strong in the challenge but with the ball skills required by Guardiola to play in a back three.

Juan BERNAT (Spa)
Age 21 (01.03.93)
Full-back who can also operate as a winger, he was signed from Valencia for €10m in July. In the Spain squad that won the European Under-19s in 2012.

Jerome BOATENG
Age 26 (03.09.88)
Central defender who played right-back for Germany at the World Cup. His brother, Kevin-Prince Boateng, plays for Schalke and Ghana.

DANTE (Bra)
Age 30 (18.10.83)
Genial off the pitch but as tough as they come on it. The central defender has also played at left-back and as a defensive midfielder.

Philipp LAHM
Age 30 (11.11.83)
Right-back or central midfield organiser, he retired from international football after captaining Germany to victory at the summer's World Cup.

RAFINHA (Bra)
Age 28 (07.09.85)
Established himself at right-back last season but misses the start of the Champions League after rupturing a ligament in his left ankle

MIDFIELDERS

Xabi ALONSO (Spa)
Age 32 (25.11.81)
Holding midfielder who was suspended for Real Madrid's Champions League Final last season after a booking in the semi-final against Bayern.

Gianluca GAUDINO
Age 17 (11.11.96)
The son of former Stuttgart and Germany midfielder Maurizio Gaudino, he made his debut in the German Super Cup in August.

Mario GOTZE
Age 22 (03.06.92)
Can play on either flank, his €39m move from Dortmund made him Germany's second most expensive player. Scored the World Cup-winning goal.

Pierre-Emile HOJBJERG (Den)
Age 19 (05.08.95)
Recently used on the right, he is the youngest Bayern player to appear in the Bundesliga, at 17 years and 251 days. Made his international debut in May.

Franck RIBERY (Fra)
Age 31 (07.04.83)
Winger who quit international football in August to "focus fully on Bayern". French player of the year three times and their 14th most-capped player.

Arjen ROBBEN (Hol)
Age 30 (23.01.84)
Quick, left-footed wide man who scored the winning goal in the 2013 Champions League Final. Criticised for his habit of going to ground too easily.

Sebastian RODE
Age 23 (11.10.90)
Defensive midfielder signed in the summer on a free transfer from Eintracht Frankfurt. He is a former Germany under-21 international.

Bastian SCHWEINSTEIGER
Age 30 (01.08.84)
Vital for his care in possession and ability to dictate the tempo, it is crucial that he steers clear of the ankle problems that have plagued him in recent times.

Plus: Javi MARTINEZ (Spa, Age 26, 02.09.88)

Xherdan SHAQIRI (Swi)
Age 22 (10.10.91)
Comfortable out wide or as a playmaker, he is held in high regard by Bayern but struggles to get a starting place. Under contract until 2016.

THIAGO Alcantara (Spa)
Age 23 (11.04.91)
Suffered a knee injury in March that kept him out of the World Cup. Born in Italy when his Brazilian father, Mazinho, was playing for Lecce.

Mitchell WEISER
Age 20 (21.04.94)
Winger who joined Bayern from Cologne in 2012 and finally made his Bundesliga debut for the club in April this year.

FORWARDS

Robert LEWANDOWSKI (Pol)
Age 26 (21.08.88)
World-class marksman who arrived on a Bosman free, he can both load and fire the gun. Excellent at holding the ball up, he is fast, athletic and skilful.

Thomas MULLER
Age 25 (13.09.89)
Comfortable anywhere around the front line. His off-the-ball running is superb and he has an eye for goal. Golden Boot winner at the 2010 World Cup.

Claudio PIZARRO (Per)
Age 35 (03.10.78)
Top foreign scorer in German football history, he is known for his aerial prowess. Now in his second spell at Bayern and is captain of his national side.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

BENFICA

Loss of stars may hamper progress

THE STADIUM

Estadio da Luz
Capacity 65,647
Hosted the 2014 Champions League Final between Real and Atletico Madrid, and the Euro 2004 Final.

THE COACH

Jorge JESUS

Age 60 (24.07.54)
Arrogant, stubborn and a terrible loser, he has a remarkable success rate for turning raw talent into the finished article.

TACTICS

Despite their immense European experience – they have reached the last two Europa League Finals – Portugal's most popular team have largely failed in the Champions League in recent years. A place in the last 16 appears a realistic goal.

■ Jesus is a brilliantly innovative attack-oriented coach but he must do without at least five players from last season's starting XI.

■ Argentinian central defender Ezequiel Garay (to Zenit) and Paraguayan goal machine Oscar Cardozo (Trabzonspor) will be the most missed and Jesus does not have any replacements of anywhere near a similar quality.

■ The coach loves to overload the wings in a 4-4-2 set-up with attacking full-backs. However, he did temper his gung-ho approach on occasion last season in Europe, switching to 4-2-3-1.

■ International midfielder Amorim is out until 2015 after rupturing knee ligaments.

Prolific...Lima is a major source of goals

EUROPEAN CUP WINNERS IN 1961 AND 1962

GROUP C Portugal

GOALKEEPERS

ARTUR (Bra)
Age 33 (25.01.81)
Lost his place last season after a string of mistakes, but back in contention after Jan Oblak joined Atletico Madrid in the summer.

Julio CESAR (Bra)
Age 34 (03.09.79)
Champions League winner in 2010 with Internazionale, he arrived in August after leaving QPR. Was Brazil's first choice at the World Cup.

Plus: Paulo LOPES (Age 36, 29.06.78)

DEFENDERS

Loris BENITO (Swi)
Age 22 (07.01.92)
Switzerland under-21 left-back who was signed from Zurich in the summer. Was bitten by a weasel during a league game last year.

CESAR (Bra)
Age 21 (28.12.92)
Central defender making his debut in European football this season after signing from Brazilian side Ponte Preta for €3m during the summer.

ELISEU
Age 30 (01.10.83)
Left-back who has also played as a winger, he is reunited with Jesus, who was his coach at Belenenses, after arriving from Malaga.

JARDEL (Bra)
Age 28 (29.03.86)
Central defender who was originally signed as a replacement for Brazil's David Luiz, when he was sold to Chelsea in 2011.

Lisandro LOPEZ (Arg)
Age 25 (01.09.89)
Arrived in Europe in 2013 and Benfica immediately put a €35m buyout clause in his contract. Back after a year-long loan at Getafe.

LUISAO (Bra)
Age 33 (13.02.81)
Known as "The Giraffe" due to his tall, lanky frame, he has been a rock at the heart of Benfica's defence for the past 12 years.

Maxi PEREIRA (Uru)
Age 30 (08.06.84)
Tough, stocky right-back with plenty of pace, he has been with the club since 2007 and is a big favourite of the club's supporters.

SILVIO (Spa)
Age 26 (28.09.87)
Happy on either flank, the full-back is on loan from Atletico Madrid for a second season. Solid in defence and a good crosser of the ball.

MIDFIELDERS

Andre ALMEIDA
Age 24 (10.09.90)
Defensive midfielder who has filled in at right-back. Came up through the academy of Lisbon rivals Sporting. Played at this summer's World Cup.

Daniel CANDEIAS
Age 26 (25.02.88)
Former Portugal under-21 winger signed from Nacional in the summer. Began his career with Porto, but was released after four games in three years.

Nico GAITAN (Arg)
Age 26 (03.02.88)
Extremely talented playmaker who has the tools to unlock even the best defences but lacks the consistency to play at the very top level.

Ola JOHN (Hol)
Age 22 (19.05.92)
Born in Liberia but fled the country at the age of two when civil war broke out. A winger, he was on loan at Hamburg for the second half of last season.

Enzo PEREZ (Arg)
Age 28 (22.02.86)
Voted the Portuguese league's player of the season last term, he originally joined the club as a winger but Jesus turned him into a central midfielder.

Eduardo SALVIO (Arg)
Age 24 (13.07.90)
Nippy winger who never stops running for his team-mates, and is a significant goal threat in his own right. Previously with Atletico Madrid.

Andreas SAMARIS (Gre)
Age 25 (13.06.89)
Scored the opening goal against Ivory Coast this summer as Greece qualified for the knockout phase of the World Cup for the first time.

Miralem SULEJMANI (Ser)
Age 25 (05.12.88)
Broke the Dutch transfer record when signed by Ajax for €16m in 2008, but things ended badly and he moved to Benfica last year.

Plus: Ruben AMORIM (Age 29, 27.01.85)

FORWARDS

TALISCA (Bra)
Age 20 (01.02.94)
His name means "beanpole" in English. Signed from Bahia for €4m, having helped Brazil to win the 2013 Toulon youth tournament.

BEBE
Age 24 (12.07.90)
Former Manchester United misfit who was the top Portuguese scorer in the league last season when on loan at Pacos Ferreira.

DERLEY (Bra)
Age 26 (29.12.87)
Was the Portuguese league's second-top scorer last season, scoring 16 goals in his first season in Europe after a career in the Brazilian lower divisions.

Franco JARA (Arg)
Age 26 (15.07.88)
Cost €5.5m when he arrived from his homeland in 2011 and has had two spells back there on loan, mostly recently at Estudiantes last season.

LIMA (Bra)
Age 31 (11.08.83)
Played for nine different clubs in his homeland before moving to Portugal five years ago. Has been prolific for Benfica and former club Braga.

PIZZI
Age 24 (06.10.89)
Signed for €13.5m by Atletico Madrid in 2012 and €6m by Benfica a year later. Capped twice by Portugal, he spent last season on loan at Espanyol.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

BORUSSIA DORTMUND

Out to prove there's life after Lewandowski

THE STADIUM

Signal Iduna Park
Capacity 65,718
The Westfalenstadion, as it is commonly known, can hold over 80,000 fans for Bundesliga games.

THE COACH

Jurgen KLOPP

Age 47 (16.06.67)
The club's longest-serving coach, he is charismatic, enthusiastic and a fine motivator, turning Dortmund into a stage for young talent.

TACTICS

Germany's most watched club are lauded for their faith in youthful, high-octane football, but – in the wake of Robert Lewandowski's move to Bayern Munich this summer – they bristle at suggestions that defeat to their domestic rivals in the 2013 Champions League Final marked the beginning of the end.

■ Klopp's default formation for the past few years has been a 4-2-3-1 system that is the framework for his side's unique blend of swarming pressing, full-throttle tempo and quick counter-attacking.

■ This season the coach is considering a return to the 4-4-2 he employed in his early days at Dortmund, featuring either a flat midfield four or a diamond.

■ With no Lewandowski as the focal point, much will be expected of newcomer Immobile. Last season Reus, Aubameyang and Mkhitaryan all chipped in with goals, all three reaching double figures.

Attacking threat...Schmelzer loves to get forward

■ CHAMPIONS LEAGUE WINNERS IN 1997

GOALKEEPERS

Mitchell LANGERAK (Aus)
Age 26 (22.08.88)
Broke two teeth in colliding with a post when making his Champions League debut last year, after Weidenfeller was sent off against Napoli.

Roman WEIDENFELLER
Age 34 (06.08.80)
Consistent with a flair for crucial saves. Became Germany's oldest debutant keeper when he played against England in November.

DEFENDERS

Erik DURM
Age 22 (12.05.92)
Left-back who impressed in Schmelzer's absence last term, winning his first cap and making the squad for Brazil in the summer.

Matthias GINTER
Age 20 (19.01.94)
As a squad member, the centre-half is Germany's youngest-ever World Cup winner. Now with the club he supported as a boy.

Kevin GROSSKREUTZ
Age 26 (19.07.88)
Made his name as a rampaging left-sided midfielder, but used as an attacking right-back with great success last season and got back in the national squad.

Mats HUMMELS
Age 25 (16.12.88)
Elegant and unassuming central defender who was given the captaincy this summer in a bid to ward off interest from other clubs.

Plus: Zlatan ALOMEROVIC (Age 23, 15.06.91)

Sokratis PAPASTATHOPOULOS (Gre)
Age 26 (09.06.88)
Central defender who was captain of AEK Athens at the age of 20, he can also operate at right-back or as a holding midfielder if required.

Lukasz PISZCZEK (Pol)
Age 29 (03.06.85)
Consistent right-back who always has one eye on getting forward. Missed the end of last season after undergoing an operation on a hip.

Neven SUBOTIC (Ser)
Age 25 (10.12.88)
Central defender capped at youth level by the USA, where he grew up, before switching allegiance to Serbia. Has had serious knee problems.

Marcel SCHMELZER
Age 26 (22.01.88)
Left-back who started out as a left-winger. Combines bite in the tackle with a gusto for attacking, but can get caught out being too far forward.

MIDFIELDERS

Sven BENDER
Age 25 (27.04.89)
Defensive midfielder who is known for his reliability and tactical awareness. He is the twin brother of Bayer Leverkusen's Lars Bender.

Jakub BLASZCZYKOWSKI (Pol)
Age 28 (14.12.85)
Known as "Kuba", he offers pace and a good supply of crosses from out wide. Missed the second half of last season through injury.

Ilkay GUNDOGAN
Age 23 (24.10.90)
Playmaker who was born in Gelsenkirchen the home of Dortmund's arch-rivals Schalke. He missed all of last season with a back injury.

Jonas HOFMANN
Age 22 (14.07.92)
Can play out wide or behind a front two, but was used almost exclusively as an impact sub last season. Is highly rated by Dortmund.

Shinji KAGAWA (Jap)
Age 25 (17.03.89)
Attacking midfielder who returned to the club in August after struggling to gain a regular place during his two seasons at Manchester United.

Sebastian KEHL
Age 34 (13.02.80)
Relinquished the captaincy this summer and will retire at the end of the season after suffering with knee injuries for the past few years.

Oliver KIRCH
Age 31 (21.08.82)
Defensive midfielder who can also fill in at right-back, he is likely to miss the first three group games after suffering a thigh injury in training.

Henrikh MKHITARYAN (Arm)
Age 25 (21.01.89)
Tricky and skilful, he offers an great attacking threat. Tended to play on the left or through the middle last season. He is fluent in six languages.

Plus: Milos JOJIC (Ser, Age 22, 19.03.92)

Nuri SAHIN (Tur)
Age 26 (05.09.88)
Classy left-footer who controls the tempo of a game. Back where he started his career after disappointing spells with Real Madrid and Liverpool.

FORWARDS

Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG (Gab)
Age 25 (18.06.89)
Pacey centre-forward who had a good first season last term. Celebrated scoring in August's German Super Cup with a Spider-Man mask.

Ciro IMMOBILE (Ita)
Age 24 (20.02.90)
The top scorer in Serie A last term, with 22 goals for Torino, Dortmund spent €18m on a man they see as Lewandowski's replacement.

JI Dong-Won (SKo)
Age 23 (28.05.91)
Intelligent and tactically aware, he can play anywhere along the front line or even drop into midfield. Once of Sunderland, he was signed from Augsburg.

Adrian RAMOS (Col)
Age 28 (22.01.86)
Fourth-top scorer in the Bundesliga last season, with Hertha Berlin. Strong in the air, with five of those goals coming from his head.

Marco REUS
Age 25 (31.05.89)
Has pace and trickery. After ankle ligament damage on the eve of the World Cup, he will be looking to draw a line under his nightmarish summer.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

CHELSEA

Silverware a must for Mourinho

THE STADIUM

Stamford Bridge
Capacity 41,798
The club's home for all of its 109-year existence, it is the eighth largest in the current Premier League.

THE COACH

Jose MOURINHO (Por)

Age 51 (26.01.63)
A winner with Porto and Internazionale, he is one of only five coaches to have been a European champion with two different teams.

TACTICS

Knocked out at the semi-final stage by Atletico Madrid and trophyless domestically last season, the Blues will want to make sure they don't endure back-to-back campaigns without silverware for the first time since Roman Abramovich bought the club in 2003.

■ With Matic protecting the back four, Fabregas will be expected to support the front men as well as link up the play.

■ Oscar will challenge Ramires, Hazard and Willian for a starting place in what is a very fluid supporting cast behind Costa.

■ Unhappy with the goalscoring contribution of his forwards last season, Mourinho brought in Costa, Drogba and Remy.

■ Costa will provide a physical presence up front and that should create plenty of space for others to exploit.

■ Azpilicueta is a more attacking option to Ivanovic at right-back and could feature in the group stage.

Marksman...Costa will be expected to provide goals

■ CHAMPIONS LEAGUE WINNERS IN 2012

GROUP G + England

GOALKEEPERS

Petr CECH (CzR)
Age 32 (20.05.82)
First choice for a decade, his place is under serious threat. Has worn a headguard since injury against Reading in 2006.

Thibaut COURTOIS (Blg)
Age 22 (11.05.92)
Returned after three seasons on loan at Atletico Madrid and will not settle for a place on the bench. Both his parents were professional volleyball players.

Mark SCHWARZER (Aus)
Age 41 (06.10.72)
Played in both legs of last season's semi-final against Atletico as Cech was injured. Signed a new, one-year contract in June.

DEFENDERS

Nathan AKE (Hol)
Age 19 (18.02.95)
Central defender or holding midfielder, he has been at the club since the age of 12. Was voted the Blues' young player of the season last term.

Cesar AZPILICUETA (Spa)
Age 25 (28.08.89)
Right-back who was first choice last season, ahead of Ashley Cole, on the opposite flank. Known by fellow players and fans of the club as "Dave".

Gary CAHILL
Age 28 (19.12.85)
Established himself as first choice centre-half for England, he was sent off in the 2012 Club World Cup Final. Scores his fair share of goals.

Andreas CHRISTENSEN (Den)
Age 18 (10.04.96)
Highly rated central defender who is tipped to become the first Chelsea academy prospect to establish himself in the first team since John Terry in 1998.

Branislav IVANOVIC (Ser)
Age 30 (22.02.84)
Tough right-back who is just as comfortable at centre-half. Missed the club's victory in the 2012 Champions League Final due to suspension.

Filipe LUIS (Bra)
Age 29 (09.08.85)
Signed as a replacement for Ashley Cole at left-back, he was on standby for Brazil's World Cup squad this summer but did not make the final cut.

John TERRY
Age 33 (07.12.80)
Club captain who missed a penalty in the 2008 Final, was suspended when they won in 2012 and injured for the 2013 Europa League Final.

Kurt ZOUMA (Fra)
Age 19 (27.10.94)
Signed from Saint-Etienne in January but remained in France until the end of last season. Elder brother, Lionel, plays for Sochaux in Ligue 1.

MIDFIELDERS

Lewis BAKER
Age 19 (25.04.95)
Has represented England at under-17 and under-19 level, and made his Chelsea debut in January, against Derby County in the FA Cup.

Cesc FABREGAS (Spa)
Age 27 (04.05.87)
Attacking midfielder who arrived in the summer from Barcelona after previous club Arsenal decided against taking up a buy-back option.

Eden HAZARD (Blg)
Age 23 (07.01.91)
Attacking talent who operates on the left side of midfield. PFA young player of the year last term, but tired towards the end of the season.

Nemanja MATIC (Ser)
Age 26 (01.08.88)
Tough-tackling defensive midfielder who returned to Chelsea for £21m in January, three years after he was sold to Benfica in a deal for David Luiz.

John OBI MIKEL (Nga)
Age 27 (22.04.87)
Defensive midfielder who has had fluctuating fortunes at Chelsea since they beat Manchester United to his signature as a teenager.

OSCAR (Bra)
Age 23 (09.09.91)
Playmaker who can play out wide as well as centrally. His light frame belies a strength that enables him to score goals as well as create them.

RAMIRES (Bra)
Age 27 (24.03.87)
Not the greatest passer of the ball, but makes up for that with great stamina and desire. Has a tendency to be rash in the tackle and is booked too often.

Mohamed SALAH (Egy)
Age 22 (15.06.92)
Quick, exciting winger who is full of tricks but can let himself down with his erratic finishing. Scored home and away for Basle against Chelsea last year.

WILLIAN (Bra)
Age 26 (09.08.88)
Developed from a central playmaker into a more versatile, roving midfielder. Snubbed Tottenham to join Chelsea last year.

FORWARDS

Diego COSTA (Spa)
Age 25 (07.10.88)
No-nonsense centre-forward who will battle all game and provide a constant goal threat. Likes a physical tussle with defenders.

Didier DROGBA (IvC)
Age 36 (11.03.78)
The club's fourth-top scorer of all time – and scorer of the winning penalty in the 2012 Champions League Final. Back after stints in China and Turkey.

Loic REMY (Fra)
Age 27 (02.01.87)
Lively striker with an eye for goal, he was signed from QPR for £10.5m after spending last season on loan at Newcastle United.

Andre SCHURRLE (Ger)
Age 23 (06.11.90)
The first signing of Mourinho's second spell. Can play centrally or wide and is full of running. Crossed for the winning goal in the World Cup Final.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

CSKA MOSCOW

Battle ahead for former Army team

THE STADIUM

Arena Khimki
Capacity 18,636
This ground in the Moscow suburbs is home until their own arena, close to the city centre, is ready next year.

THE COACH

Leonid SLUTSKIY

Age 43 (04.05.71)
Intellectual and a media favourite, the "Russian Mourinho" is seen as the likely successor to national coach Fabio Capello.

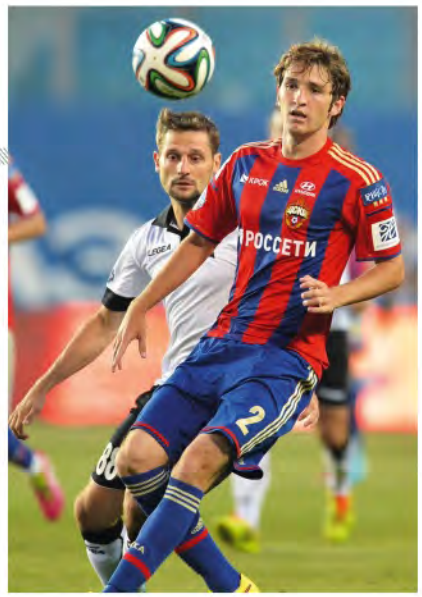
TACTICS

Russian champions for the past two seasons, the team once owned by the Soviet Ministry of Defence won the UEFA Cup in 2005 and became the country's first club side to win a European tournament.

■ Although CSKA normally like to have three sharp, attacking players supporting a centre-forward, Slutskiy will use more defensive, counter-attacking tactics against Europe's better sides.

■ With former Switzerland under-21 winger Steven Zuber joining Bundesliga side Hoffenheim in August, Slutskiy moved quickly to bloster his squad with the signing of Israeli international Natkho.

■ Doumbia's goals played a big part in CSKA's success last term. The Ivorian struggled with back problems during the previous campaign, so keeping him fit this term will be vitally important if Slutskiy's side are to better the three points they picked up in the group stage in 2013.



Back...Fernandes is fit again after injury problems

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUARTER-FINALISTS IN 2010

GOALKEEPERS

Igor AKINFEEV
Age 28 (08.04.86)
Club captain and Russia's first choice – despite crucial mistakes at the World Cup. Saved a penalty on his CSKA debut, aged 17.

Sergei CHEPCHUGOV
Age 29 (15.07.85)
Has been with CSKA since December 2009 but rarely gets an outing due to the consistancy of first-choice keeper Akinfeev.

Sergei REVYAKIN
Age 19 (02.04.95)
Started out as a striker before taking up goalkeeping and becoming the youngest person to play in the Russian Premier League, aged 16.

DEFENDERS

Aleksei BEREZUTSKI
Age 32 (20.06.82)
Centre-back who can also play at left-back but, unlike his twin Vasili, he is not guaranteed a place in the starting line-up these days.

Vasili BEREZUTSKI
Age 32 (20.06.82)
The elder twin by 20 minutes, he was appointed national captain at the World Cup. Plays at centre-half and lacks pace, but is good in the air.

Nikita CHERNOV
Age 18 (14.01.96)
Central defender who was a regular in the CSKA side in last season's UEFA Youth League, in which his side reached the last 16.

Mario FERNANDES (Bra)
Age 23 (19.09.90)
An attacking right-back who returned to action this season after time out with a serious injury. Has expressed an interest in playing for Russia.

Sergei IGNASHEVICH
Age 35 (14.07.79)
Important at the heart of the defence for club and country, he is a good long-range passer and can shoot from distance. Refuses to speak to the media.

Kirill NABABKIN
Age 28 (08.09.86)
Right-back who has played on the left in the absence of the injured Shchennikov. Made his league debut for now-defunct FC Moscow against CSKA.

Georgi SHCHENNIKOV
Age 23 (27.04.91)
Left-back who is the son of Olympic walker Mikhail Shchennikov, who won a silver medal in 1996. Linked with Chelsea in the summer.

MIDFIELDERS

Aleksandrs CAUNA (Lat)
Age 26 (19.01.88)
Wide player who possesses a good shot. Had a trial with Chelsea in 2008, three years before he moved to Russia and joined CSKA.

Alan DZAGOEV
Age 24 (17.06.90)
Plays in the central attacking role and brings invention to the team, but has a habit of picking up red and yellow cards due to a bad temper.

Rasmus ELM (Swe)
Age 26 (17.03.88)
Defensive midfielder who has two older brothers who are both professionals: Viktor who plays for AZ in Holland and David of Sweden's Kalmar.

Roman EREMENKO (Fin)
Age 27 (19.03.87)
Inventive playmaker with a good shot who was signed in August. His father, Alexei Eremenko, played for Spartak Moscow and Dynamo Moscow.

Georgi MILANOV (Bul)
Age 22 (19.02.92)
Bulgaria's player of the year in 2012, he joined CSKA the following year for €2.7m. His twin brother, Iliya Milanov, is still at his old club, Litex Lovech.

Bibras NATKHO (Isr)
Age 26 (18.02.88)
Can play an attacking or holding role. Had a previous spell in Russia with Rubin Kazan before returning this summer with CSKA.

Zoran TOSIC (Ser)
Age 27 (28.04.87)
Clever left-winger who was highly rated when signed by Manchester United, but made just five first-team appearances before moving on.

Pontus WERNBLOOM (Swe)
Age 28 (25.06.86)
Tough holding midfielder who picks up more than his share of yellow cards. Scored against Real Madrid on his CSKA debut in 2012 to secure a 1-1 draw.

Dmitri YEFREMOV
Age 19 (01.04.95)
Wide player who is happiest on the right flank, but can swap or play centrally. He has been capped by Russia at all levels up to under-21.

FORWARDS

Konstantin BAZELYUK
Age 21 (12.04.93)
Voted the Russian league's best young player last year. Capped by Russia at under-21 level, he has been with CSKA all his career.

Seydou DOUMBIA (IvC)
Age 25 (31.12.88)
Powerful striker who was top scorer in the Russian Premier League last season but failed to make Ivory Coast's World Cup squad. Went to the 2010 finals.

Ahmed MUSA (Nga)
Age 21 (14.10.92)
Speedy winger whose finishing has been a bit wayward at times in the past, although he did score twice against Argentina in Brazil.

Kirill PANCHENKO
Age 24 (16.10.89)
Signed in the summer from Tom Tomsk, he is the son of Victor Panchenko, who is head of CSKA's scouting and was the league's top scorer in 1993.

VITINHO (Bra)
Age 20 (09.10.93)
Joined CSKA from Botafogo in his homeland in September 2013 but has had problems adapting to the living conditions in his new home.

Plus: Nikolai DERGACHYOV (Age 20, 24.05.94)

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

GALATASARAY

Prandelli hired to regain domestic dominance

THE STADIUM

Turk Telecom Arena
Capacity 52,650
It might not have the ability to intimidate like the old Ali Sami Yen, but it still crackles with raw emotion.

THE COACH

Cesare PRANDELLI (Ita)

Age 57 (19.08.57)
Resigned as Italy coach after the World Cup. Took the Galatasaray job after being impressed by the ambition of club president Unal Aysal.

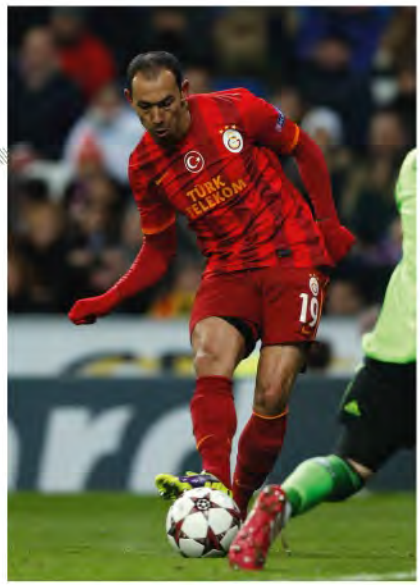
TACTICS

With Fenerbahce disqualified due to a match-fixing scandal, last season's Turkish league runners-up took the automatic group spot. Former Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini left in the summer after just one season and new boss Prandelli has promised to not only build "a team that plays well but to form a team that only wins".

■ The only Turkish club to have won a European trophy (the 2000 UEFA Cup), Gala's top priority is to reassert their national dominance after losing lasts season's title race to sworn Istanbul foes Besiktas.

■ Fans are demanding a more adventurous style, but Prandelli is unlikely to accommodate them, preferring to rely on defensive insurance and hitting with speed and intelligence on the counter.

■ Although 4-2-3-1 is the principal template for the Italian's side, they can just as easily adopt a 4-3-3 or 4-3-2-1 shape.



Veteran...Umut can still do a job coming from the bench

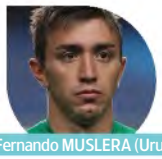
EUROPEAN CUP SEMI-FINALISTS IN 1989

GROUP D Turkey

GOALKEEPERS

Sinan BOLAT

Age 26 (03.09.88)
Arrived from Porto this summer on a 12-month loan. Scored with a header for Standard Liege in a 2009 Champions League tie.



Fernando MUSLERA (Uru)

Age 28 (16.06.86)
Outstanding Uruguayan now in his fourth season between the Galatasaray posts. Dubbed the "Little Beaver" by fans at former club, Lazio.

DEFENDERS

Hamit ALTINTOP

Age 31 (08.12.82)
Dynamic, enterprising right-back or wide midfielder who is one of the club's most experienced performers, though is rather injury-prone.

Aurelien CHEDJOU (Cam)

Age 28 (20.06.86)
Combative and resilient centre-back, who since signing from Lille a year ago, has become a key figure. Major threat in the air at set-pieces.

GOKHAN Zan

Age 33 (07.09.81)
While the former Turkey stopper undoubtedly is past his prime, his total commitment and muscular approach can be beneficial in short, sharp bursts.

HAKAN Balta

Age 31 (23.03.83)
German-born left-back who scored in the last game of the 2007-08 season to win the title for Galatasaray. A current Turkey international.

Plus: EMRE CAN Coskun (Age 20, 07.07.94), **TARIK Camdal** (Age 23, 24.03.91)

KORAY Gunter

Age 20 (16.08.94)
A German-born son of Turkish "gastarbeiter", the promising centre-back came through the Dortmund youth ranks and was a regular in German youth sides.

SABRI Sarioglu

Age 30 (26.07.84)
Right-back, standing 5ft 7in, who can also play further forward on the flank. A former club captain and Turkey international.

SEMIH Kaya

Age 23 (24.02.91)
Extremely promising young centre-back conspicuous for his blonde hair and calmness under pressure. Born in Bergama, the city famous for its carpets.

Alex TELLES (Bra)

Age 21 (15.12.92)
The Brazilian left-back is a showstopper going forward, but can be exposed by tricky, direct wingers. In 2013 Brazilian league team of the season.

VEYSEL Sari

Age 26 (25.07.88)
Useful defensive utility player capable of filling in well at right-back, in central defence or as a midfield holder. Two full caps for Turkey.

MIDFIELDERS

Blerim DZEMAILI (Swi)

Age 28 (12.04.86)
Born to an Albanian family in Macedonia, he migrated with his family to Switzerland at the age of four. Signed from Napoli this season.

Emre COLAK

Age 23 (20.05.91)
A very talented left-footed creator, but his inconsistency and wayward finishing have held him back. Product of the club's youth system.

Umut GUNDOGAN

Age 24 (12.06.90)
Clever attacking midfielder who was born in Belgium to Turkish immigrant parents. Played in the same Belgian youth teams as Eden Hazard and Dries Mertens.

Felipe MELO (Bra)

Age 31 (26.06.83)
Fiercely competitive Brazilian midfield holder with more technical ability than he is given credit for. Previously with Fiorentina and Juventus.

OLCAN Adin

Age 28 (30.09.85)
Gifted attacking midfielder purchased from Trabzonspor this summer for €4m. Inventive and refined, he can play on either wing.

SELCUK Inan

Age 29 (10.02.85)
Can be criticised for being too static, but remains the team's metronome. Comfortable on the ball, never hurried and outstanding in his passing.

Wesley SNEIJDER (Hol)

Age 30 (09.06.84)
Despite rumours of his decline, still combines his invention with endeavour. A Champions League victor with Internazionale in 2010.

Plus: KAAN Baysal (Age 18, 19.01.96), **SINAN Gumus** (Age 20, 15.01.94)

YASIN Oztekin

Age 27 (19.03.87)
Born in Dortmund, the enterprising and multi-dimensional schemer was bought from Erciyesspor this summer in a €2.5m deal.

YEKTA Kurtulus

Age 28 (11.12.85)
Gritty, all-action midfielder bought from Kasimpasa for €3.6m in January 2011. An uncomplaining, completely trustworthy back-up.

FORWARDS

Goran PANDEV (Mac)

Age 31 (27.07.83)
His country's all-time top international goalscorer, the former Internazionale and Lazio front man was signed this season from Napoli.

BRUMA (Por)

Age 19 (24.10.94)
Promising winger looking to relaunch his career after seriously damaging his knee in a Turkish Cup game. Star of the 2013 Under-20 World Cup.

BURAK Yilmaz

Age 29 (15.07.85)
The bullish marksman made a European name for himself by scoring six goals in the 2012-13 Champions League. Frequently linked with a move abroad.

UMUT Bulut

Age 31 (15.03.83)
The veteran striker might not be the goal machine of his Trabzonspor days, but still can do a job from the bench or in rotation. Thirty caps for Turkey.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

JUVENTUS

Seeking a return to European glories

THE STADIUM

Juventus Stadium
Capacity 41,254
Built on the site of the old Stadio delle Alpi and opened in 2011. Unusually for Italy, the club own the ground.

THE COACH

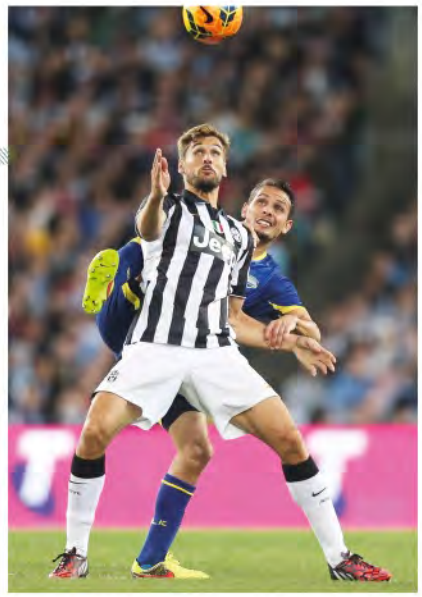
Massimiliano ALLEGRI
Age 47 (11.08.67)
Showed himself to be a pragmatist in his previous jobs at Cagliari and AC Milan, adapting his tactical plans to the players at his disposal.

TACTICS

The eve-of-season departure of coach Antonio Conte, to be replaced by ex-Milan boss Allegri, prompts a huge question mark. With or without Conte, however, it would only be natural to expect the "Old Lady" to concentrate all her best efforts on the Champions League. Having won the last three Serie A titles, a tilt at Europe seems the logical next step.

■ Allegri's Juventus will inevitably look similar to Conte's successful team, built around the Buffon-Chiellini-Pirlo-Tevez backbone. However, the signing of Evra has seen Allegri ditch Conte's successful three-at-the-back system in favour of a flat back-four for the start of the season. In European competition, at least, expect Allegri's side to be traditionally "careful".

■ Further forward, Morata will be hoping to break up the Tevez-Llorente partnership that enjoyed so much success last season.



Target man...Llorente almost left for Valencia

■ EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS IN 1985 AND 1996

Gianluigi BUFFON — GOALKEEPERS
Age 36 (28.01.78)
An inspirational leader, both on and off the field. A brilliant shot-stopper and great organiser, he is still one of the world's very best.

RUBINHO (Bra)
Age 32 (04.08.82)
Third-choice keeper who has also played for Genoa, Palermo, Livorno and Torino since moving to Italian football from Vitoria Setubal in 2006.

Marco STORARI
Age 37 (07.01.77)
Buffon's deputy since joining from Milan in 2010, he is rated by many Juve fans as one of the best second-choice keepers around.

Andrea BARZAGLI — DEFENDERS
Age 33 (08.05.81)
Solid and composed with a great positional instinct. His commanding physical presence belies his impressive ball-playing skill.

Leonardo BONUCCI
Age 27 (01.05.87)
Established himself at the centre of Antonio Conte's back three, he faces a battle with Barzagli to partner Chiellini in Allegri's 4-3-1-2 set up.

Martin CACERES (Uru)
Age 27 (07.04.87)
Versatile centre-back who can also play at full-back. Held firm against many of his team-mates in Uruguay's World Cup win over Italy.

Giorgio CHIELLINI
Age 30 (14.08.84)
The "other man" in the Luis Suarez biting incident at the 2014 World Cup, he is the no-nonsense organiser of the Juve back line.

Patrice EVRA (Fra)
Age 33 (15.05.81)
A key addition to a squad that lacked a specialist left-back. Has played in 96 European games, including three Champions League Finals.

Stephan LICHTSTEINER (Swi)
Age 30 (16.01.84)
The all-action full-back has been christened "The Swiss Express" due to his tireless performances up and down the right flank.

Angelo OGBONNA
Age 26 (23.05.88)
Born to Nigerian parents who emigrated to Italy in 1983, the big centre-back has struggled to secure a first-team place and has been linked with Sevilla.

Frederik SORENSEN (Den)
Age 22 (14.04.92)
Back at the club after a two-year spell at Bologna as part of a co-ownership deal. Equally comfortable at right-back or centre-back.

Kwadwo ASAMOAH (Gha) — MIDFIELDERS
Age 25 (09.12.88)
A regular on the left or as an attacking wing-back since joining from Udinese in 2012, he could be another victim of the coach's new formation.

Kingsley COMAN (Fra)
Age 18 (13.06.96)
Exciting prospect dubbed the "new Paul Pogba". He reportedly turned down Arsenal and Liverpool to join the "Old Lady" from PSG in the summer.

Claudio MARCHISIO
Age 28 (19.01.86)
A key figure for both club and country, he has been with Juve since the age of seven. A tough tackler, he can play out wide or through the middle.

Roberto PEREYRA (Arg)
Age 23 (07.01.91)
Best known as a left-winger despite being right-footed, he can play in a variety of midfield roles. He has joined on a season's loan from Udinese.

Andrea PIRLO
Age 35 (19.05.79)
Vastly experienced and influential playmaker who, despite his advancing years, continues to be the man that makes Juventus, and Italy, tick.

Paul POGBA (Fra)
Age 21 (15.03.93)
Tall, strong and skilful, he is one of the hottest young prospects in European football. Enhanced his growing reputation at this summer's World Cup.

ROMULO
Age 27 (22.05.87)
His displays down the right while on loan at Verona earned him a place in Italy's provisional squad for the World Cup but he didn't make the final cut.

Arturo VIDAL (Chl) — MIDFIELDERS
Age 27 (22.05.87)
Arguably the perfect blend of midfield quality and quantity, which is why Juventus will do well to hold on to him.

Sebastian GIOVINCO — FORWARDS
Age 27 (26.01.87)
An exciting dribbler, the diminutive attacker can play as a winger or a second striker. Has attracted interest from Arsenal and Spurs.

Fernando LLORENTE (Spa)
Age 29 (26.02.85)
Scored 16 times in his debut Serie A campaign. The goals continued to flow this pre-season, leading to a rumoured bid from Valencia.

Alvaro MORATA (Spa)
Age 21 (23.10.92)
The club's new No. 9 after joining from Real Madrid. A proven scorer at every level, he was a late substitute in the Champions League Final.

Simone PEPE
Age 30 (30.08.83)
The experienced winger has vowed to fight for his place in Allegri's team after calling off negotiations about a proposed move to Parma.

Carlos TEVEZ (Arg)
Age 30 (05.02.84)
Easily Juve's best player of last season, combining class, goals and a competitive mindset. Could well be in line for a recall to the Argentina squad.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

LIVERPOOL

Will Suarez's goals be missed?

THE STADIUM

Anfield
Capacity 45,276
Home since the club was founded in 1892, it was originally where city rivals Everton played matches.

THE COACH

Brendan RODGERS (NI)
Age 41 (26.01.73)
Worked at Chelsea under Jose Mourinho before setting out on his own. His son, Anton, plays for League One side Swindon Town.

TACTICS

Pushed Manchester City all the way in the Premier League before eventually finishing second, having scored 101 goals in the process – which is a club record for a top-flight campaign. Of those, 31 were scored by Luis Suarez.

■ Rodgers has invested the money he received from Barcelona for Suarez in nine new players in a bid to revamp his side.

■ Liverpool's problems were mostly at the other end last season and the arrival of Lovren, along with two Spanish full-backs should tighten things up.

■ Gerrard remains the driving force in the midfield, even though he now plays in a deeper role. Lallana, Balotelli and Can bring fresh competition for places.

■ The pace and trickery of Sterling either through the middle or out wide will cause problems for most defences. Lambert is an old-school centre-forward who can also play a bit and offers a goal threat.

Old school...Lambert was signed from Southampton

■ EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS IN 1977, 1978, 1981, 1984 AND 2005

GROUP B + England

GOALKEEPERS

Brad JONES (Aus)
Age 32 (19.03.82)
Rarely played since joining four years ago, but did save a penalty with his first touch on his Premier League debut for the club in 2012.

Simon MIGNOLET (Blg)
Age 26 (06.03.88)
First choice for his club, but only on the bench for his country. Speaks five languages and has a degree in political science.

DEFENDERS

Jose ENRIQUE (Spa)
Age 28 (23.01.86)
Left-back who made just nine appearances last term after his season ended early following knee surgery in November.

Jon FLANAGAN
Age 21 (01.01.93)
Full-back who was on standby for England's World Cup squad. He is, however, also eligible for the Republic of Ireland through his grandparents.

Glen JOHNSON
Age 30 (23.08.84)
Full-back who started out on the right but now happy to play on either flank. Dangerous going forward but can switch off when defending.

Dejan LOVREN (Cro)
Age 25 (05.07.89)
Fiery centre-half who became the most expensive defender in Liverpool's history when signed from Southampton for £20m in the summer.

Javier MANQUILLO (Spa)
Age 20 (05.05.94)
Right-back on a two-season loan from Atletico Madrid. Was with Real Madrid until the age of 13. A Euro Under-19 winner with Spain in 2012.

Ryan McLAUGHLIN (NI)
Age 19 (30.09.94)
Right-back who spent the end of last season on loan at Barnsley and made his international debut against Uruguay.

Alberto MORENO (Spa)
Age 22 (05.07.92)
Left-back who was cut from his country's provisional 30-man squad for the World Cup. Won the Europa League last season with Sevilla.

Mamadou SAKHO (Fra)
Age 24 (13.02.90)
Strong, powerful and athletic central defender. A full international, he captained France at under-21 level and skippered PSG at 17.

Martin SKRTEL (Slk)
Age 29 (15.12.84)
Central defender who is now in his eighth season at Liverpool. Slovakian footballer of the year four times, he won the Russian Premier League with Zenit.

Kolo TOURE (IvC)
Age 33 (19.03.81)
Older brother of Manchester City's Yaya, the centre-back was in the Arsenal side which went through the 2003–04 league season unbeaten.

MIDFIELDERS

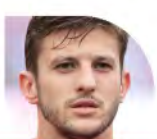
Joe ALLEN (Wal)
Age 24 (14.03.90)
Fluent Welsh speaker, he is tidy in possession but yet to hit the heights since following manager Rodgers from Swansea City in 2012.

Emre CAN (Ger)
Age 20 (12.01.94)
Not the quickest, but a powerful box-to-box German under-21 international who was signed from Bayer Leverkusen in the summer.

Philippe COUTINHO (Bra)
Age 22 (12.06.92)
Creative, attacking midfielder who can play behind a central striker or out wide. Made his senior international debut for Brazil in October 2010.

Steven GERRARD
Age 34 (30.05.80)
England's third-most capped player with 114 games, he quit after captaining his country at the World Cup. Won the 2005 Champions League.

Jordan HENDERSON
Age 24 (17.06.90)
Struggled initially after a £20m move from Sunderland in 2011, but has now settled in alongside Gerrard as a driving force in Liverpool's midfield.



Adam LALLANA
Age 26 (10.05.88)
Broke through last season at Southampton, winning a place in the England side and a move to Liverpool. Clever passer with good dribbling ability.

LUCAS Leiva (Bra)
Age 27 (09.01.87)
Was a regular in the side last season, winning his place back in the Brazil squad, until Rodgers moved Gerrard back into a deeper midfield role.

Lazar MARKOVIC (Ser)
Age 20 (02.03.94)
Exciting winger who missed last season's Europa League Final after being sent off in the semi-final against Juventus for a touchline fight.

FORWARDS

Mario BALOTELLI (Ita)
Age 24 (12.08.90)
Explosive and unpredictable, both on and off the pitch, he was on the bench when Internazionale won the 2010 Champions League.

Rickie LAMBERT
Age 32 (16.02.82)
Strong centre-forward who returned to his boyhood club this summer, having rebuilt his career after being released by Liverpool at 15.

Raheem STERLING
Age 19 (08.12.94)
Exciting Jamaican-born England international who can play wide or through the middle. Signed from QPR at the age of 15.

Daniel STURRIDGE
Age 25 (01.09.89)
Centre-forward who likes to drift out wide. Excellent in one-on-one situations. Under extra pressure to score goals now that Suarez has gone.

LUDOGORETS

Rapid rise for group stage debutants

THE STADIUM

Vassil Levski Stadium
Capacity 43,000
Champions League games will be played in Sofia, rather than at the club's 6,000-capacity arena in Razgrad.

THE COACH

Georgi DERMENDZHIEV

Age 59 (04.01.55)
Replaced Stoycho Stoev in July after the team were held to a 0-0 draw at home by Partizan Belgrade in the qualifying rounds.

TACTICS

Domestic champions for the past three seasons, the team from the city of Razgrad became the second Bulgarian side to reach the group stage – after Levski Sofia in 2006 – with a remarkable penalty shoot-out victory over Steaua Bucharest of Romania.

■ Dermendzhiev has been part of the "Ludogorets project" since they were playing in the second division four years, as assistant to first Ivaylo Petev and then Stoycho Stoev.

■ Club owner Kiril Domuschiev is one of the country's biggest oligarchs and he has now seen his greatest ambition achieved with qualification for the group stage of the Champions League. He made his money in pharmaceuticals.

■ Alternatives include Aleksandar Aleksandrov at right-back and Angulo on the left, while Mihail Alexandrov is another option on the left side of midfield. Younes could come in up front.

Hero...Moti went in goal for the penalty shoot-out

GOALKEEPERS

Ivan CVOROVIC
Age 28 (21.09.85)
Born in Serbia but capped by his adopted country. Began at Partizan Belgrade but has played in Bulgaria for the last 10 years.

Vladislav STOYANOV
Age 27 (08.06.87)
Now first choice of the national coach Lyuboslav Penev. Sent off against Steaua in the Champions League qualifying round.

DEFENDERS

Aleksandar ALEKSANDROV
Age 28 (13.04.86)
The central defender joined Ludogorets in January of this year after more than 240 games in nine seasons with Cherno More.

Brayan ANGULO (Col)
Age 24 (02.11.89)
Left America Cali in his homeland for Portuguese football and then played in Spain before joining Ludogorets this summer.

Alexandre BARTHE (Fra)
Age 28 (05.03.86)
Central defender who began at Saint-Etienne. Moved to Bulgaria in 2008 and won five Bulgarian titles in a row, including two with Litex.

Junior CAICARA (Bra)
Age 25 (27.04.89)
After playing in Brazilian and Portuguese football, the central defender was an immediate first choice on moving to Ludogorets.

Plus: Preslav PETROV (Age 19, 01.05.95), **Aleksandar VASILEV** (Age 19, 27.04.95)

Tero MANTYLA (Fin)
Age 23 (18.04.91)
Central defender who played in England for Portsmouth. Joined Ludogorets in 2011 and has won three consecutive champion's tittles.

Yordan MINEV
Age 33 (14.10.80)
The tough left-sided defender likes to join up with the attack whenever possible. His twin brother Veselin currently plays for Levski Sofia.

Cosmin MOTI (Rom)
Age 29 (03.12.84)
Went in goal for the penalty shoot-out against Steaua after Stoyanov was sent off and became a hero as he scored one and saved two.

Georgi TERZIEV
Age 22 (18.04.92)
He had played for Sliven, Neftohimik and Chernomorets before joining Ludogorets. A talented defender who has a bright future.

VITINHA (Por)
Age 28 (11.02.86)
Before his transfer to Ludogorets he played in Portugal and Romania. Left-back who joined the club in 2012.

MIDFIELDERS

Anicet ABEL (Mad)
Age 24 (13.03.90)
Quick, with good dribbling skills and a strong shot, he spent three years in the reserves at Auxerre before moving to Bulgaria.

Mihail ALEKSANDROV
Age 25 (11.06.89)
Joined Borussia Dortmund at 18 and spent three years there before returning to Bulgaria. Had a season with Akademik before moving to Ludogorets.

Guilherme CHOCO (Bra)
Age 24 (18.01.90)
Now in his fourth season with the club, he really gets the plaudits that he deserves but is a player who can always be relied upon to perform.

Svetoslav DYAKOV
Age 30 (31.05.84)
Plays a key defensive role, dictating the pace and picking out team-mates with passes. Does, however, pick up a fair amount of cards.

Fabio ESPINHO (Por)
Age 29 (18.08.85)
Once a member of Porto's reserve side, he left his homeland last year and helped Ludogorets to win the double in his first season.

MARCELINHO (BRA)
Age 30 (24.08.84)
Attacking midfielder who will start in central midfield and constantly switch positions. Scores his fair share of important goals.

WANDERSON (Bra)
Age 26 (02.01.88)
In his first season playing outside his homeland, he scored the last-minute goal that took the game against Steaua to penalties.

Plus: Kristiyan KITOV (Age 17, 14.10.96), **Sebastian HERNANDEZ** (Col, Age 27, 02.10.86)

Hristo ZLATINSKI
Age 29 (22.01.85)
Covers a lot of ground in tandem with Dyakov. Strong character who helps create the platform from which attacks are built.

FORWARDS

Dani ABALO (Spa)
Age 26 (29.09.87)
He had played in Spain and Portugal before to move to Ludogorets last season. Plays on the right wing and has plenty of pace.

Roman BEZJAK
Age 25 (21.02.89)
Front man who had his critics when he first joined the club, but has now begun to score goals regularly and has won over the sceptics.

Virgil MISIDJAN (Hol)
Age 21 (24.07.93)
Moved to Bulgaria last season after playing reserve-team football in his homeland. He is very quick and clever with the ball at his feet.

Juninho QUIXADA (Bra)
Age 28 (12.12.85)
Usually he plays in behind Bezjak and has a knack of popping up in goalscoring positions. Joined Ludogorets in 2011.

Hamza YOUNES (Tun)
Age 28 (16.04.86)
Signed from Botev in August, having previously played in his homeland and Romania. Won his first international cap earlier this year.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

MALMO

Group debutants have exceeded expectations

THE STADIUM

Malmo New Stadium
Capacity 24,000
Opened in 2009 at a cost of £65m. Currently named the Swedbank Stadion as part of a sponsorship deal.

THE COACH

Ade HAREIDE (Nor)

Age 60 (23.09.53)
Hugely experienced in Scandinavian football, he came out of retirement to take charge of Malmo in January 2014.

TACTICS

After victories over Ventspils, Sparta Prague and Salzburg in the qualifying rounds, Malmo have become the first Swedish club to reach the Champions League group stage since Helsingborgs in 2000.

■ Hareide, who has won titles in all three of the main Scandinavian leagues, replaced Rikard Norling, who surprisingly quit after winning the 2013 title.

■ Malmo sold Erik Friberg to Bologna, Tokela Rantie (Bournemouth) and Johan Dahlin (Genclerbiligi) to fund deals for midfielder Molins, striker Rosenberg from West Bromwich Albion and teenager Hammar from Everton.

■ Former Norway coach Hareide has stuck with a rigid 4-4-2, with a front two of Rosenberg and either Thelin or Eriksson.

■ The team's creativity comes from the flanks, where captain Molins will be a key figure when he recovers from injury.

On their way...Eriksson celebrates a goal in qualifying

EUROPEAN CUP RUNNERS-UP IN 1979

GROUP A Sweden

GOALKEEPERS

Zlatan AZINOVIC
Age 26 (31.01.88)
Back-up keeper who played for Sweden's Under-21 side although he has Bosnian heritage. Previously with Kalmar and Trelleborgs.

Sixten MOHLIN
Age 18 (17.01.95)
Teenager who has represented Sweden at the Under-17 world and European championships. Born in Holland to Swedish and Cape Verdian parents.

Robin OLSEN (Den)
Age 24 (08.01.90)
Danish-born keeper who has emerged as the club's number one in 2014 following the sale of Johan Dahlin to Genclerbirligi.

DEFENDERS

Matias CONCHA
Age 34 (31.03.80)
Experienced right-sided defender who returned to Malmo in 2012 after spells with Djurgardens and Bochum. Of Chilean heritage.

Johan HAMMAR
Age 20 (22.02.94)
Former Everton trainee who returned to his hometown club in 2013 but has yet to establish himself in the Malmo first team.

Filip HELANDER
Age 21 (22.04.93)
Tall centre-back who has established himself as a first-team regular in the past two years. Former Sweden Under-21 international.

Erik JOHANSSON
Age 25 (30.12.88)
Centre-back who made his senior international debut earlier this year. Has also appeared in a defensive midfield role.

Pa KONATE
Age 20 (25.04.94)
Sweden Under-21 left-back who spent the first half of 2014 on loan to Osters. Born in Malmo to a Guinean father and Gambian mother.

RICARDINHO (Bra)
Age 29 (09.09.84)
Attack-minded left-back who has been a regular since joining Malmo from his hometown club Curitiba in 2009.

Anton TINNERHOLM
Age 23 (26.02.91)
Right-back who joined Malmo earlier this year as a replacement for Hanover-bound Miiko Albornoz.

MIDFIELDERS

Enoch ADU (Gha)
Age 23 (14.09.90)
Defensive midfielder signed from Club Brugge in July after a spell on loan at Norwegian club Norrkoping. Previously with Nordsjaelland.

Pawel CIBICKI
Age 20 (09.01.94)
Malmo-born attacking midfielder who almost joined Dutch club Groningen earlier this year. Eligible to play for Poland via his parents.

Magnus ERIKSSON
Age 24 (08.04.90)
Attacker who has found his form again at Malmo after a disappointing spell in Belgium with Gent. Made his senior Sweden debut earlier this year.

Emil FORSBERG
Age 22 (23.10.91)
Left-winger who was a regular during last year's championship-winning campaign, earning a call-up to the senior Sweden squad.

Markus HALSTI (Fin)
Age 30 (19.03.84)
Defensive midfield who proved to be a lynchpin of Malmo's 2013 Swedish Championship-winning side. Can also play in defence and out wide.

Piotr JOHANSSON
Age 19 (28.02.95)
Teenaged midfielder who made his senior debut this summer.

Simon KROON
Age 21 (16.06.93)
Sweden Under-21 winger who has mostly been used as an impact substitute from the bench.

Guillermo MOLINS
Age 25 (26.09.88)
Uruguay-born right-sided attacking midfielder who also serves as club captain. A knee injury could keep him out of action until 2015.

Amin NAZARI
Age 21 (26.04.93)
Young midfielder who has yet to become a regular. Has appeared for Sweden's Under-21 but also eligible to play for Iran and Philippines.

Erdal RAKIP
Age 18 (13.02.96)
Teenage midfielder who has represented Sweden at Under-17 and Under-19 levels.

Simon THERN
Age 21 (18.09.92)
Central midfielder who has also been deployed in central defence and in wide midfield. Already a full Sweden international.

FORWARDS

Agon MEHMETI (Alb)
Age 24 (20.11.89)
Striker who is back at Malmo after a disappointing spell with Palermo. Opted to represent Albania at senior level after playing for Sweden's Under-21s.

Markus ROSENBERG
Age 31 (27.09.82)
Local hero whose goals were crucial in the Champions League qualifiers. Back home after mixed experiences in Germany, Spain and England.

Isaac THELIN
Age 22 (24.06.92)
Former Swedish Under-21 striker who joined Malmo from Norrkoping earlier this year.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

MANCHESTER CITY

Looking to make a bigger impression

THE STADIUM

City of Manchester Stadium
Capacity 45,500
Originally built for the 2002 Commonwealth Games, there are plans to increase its capacity to 62,000.

THE COACH

Manuel PELLEGRINI (Chl)
Age 60 (16.09.53)
A fan of slick, attacking football, the Chilean has admitted that defending the Premier League title is his main priority this season.

TACTICS

The options offered by his expensively assembled squad mean that Pellegrini could play any number of formations, although 4-4-2 remains the favoured choice.

■ The arrival of French centre-back Mangala will hopefully bring some much needed solidity to a central defence that has often been exposed in Europe.

■ The extra options at full-back could see Kolarov operating more in midfield.

■ The Brazilian duo of Fernando and Fernadinho will battle out to partner Toure in the defensive midfield positions, although Pellegrini may consider playing all three against top-class opponents.

■ Nasri and Silva will provide support from the flanks, with Navas offering a dangerous alternative out wide.

■ Further forward, much will depend on the fitness of Aguero. Dzeko and Jovetic are potential partners, although another option is Silva in the no10 role.

Key...a fit Aguero will be a big boost for City's chances

GOALKEEPERS

Willy CABALLERO (Arg)
Age 31 (19.09.81)
A £6m summer signing from Malaga where he played under Pellegrini. He says he has not signed just to sit on the bench.

Joe HART
Age 27 (19.04.87)
Having seen off Costel Pantilimon, the England first cloice now faces another threat at City from new signing Caballero.

DEFENDERS

Gael CLICHY (Fra)
Age 29 (26.07.85)
One of a trio of ex-Arsenal players in the squad. Just how much he plays will depend largely on where Pellegrini deploys Kolarov.

Martin DEMICHELIS (Arg)
Age 33 (20.12.80)
Initially prone to the odd howler, the experienced central defender won over many doubters last season, earning an international recall.

Aleksandar KOLAROV (Ser)
Age 28 (10.11.85)
An overlapping full-back with an explosive left foot, he is often pushed further forward to offer more balture to the City midfield.

Vincent KOMPANY (Blg)
Age 28 (10.04.86)
Highly rated and inspirational skipper of both club and country. If the Belgian defensive rock is at the top of his game then City rarely lose.

Eliaquim MANGALA (Fra)
Age 23 (13.02.91)
Powerful centre-half who became the Premier League's most expensive defender when he was signed from Porto for £32m in August.

Matija NASTASIC (Ser)
Age 21 (28.03.93)
Composed centre-back who missed much of last season through injury. Has recently been a transfer target for Arsenal and Juventus.

Bacary SAGNA (Fra)
Age 31 (14.02.83)
Experienced and versatile right-back who joined on a Bosman from Arsenal in the summer. Can also play in the centre or down the left side.

Pablo ZABALETA (Arg)
Age 29 (16.01.85)
The tough-tackling, fans' favourite was an ever-present at the World Cup but will face competition from Sagna for the City right-back role.

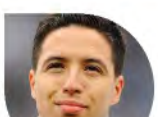
MIDFIELDERS

FERNANDINHO (Bra)
Age 29 (04.05.85)
Although the defensive midfielder's main role is to break up play, he also has a great passing range and a powerful shot with either foot.

FERNANDO (Bra)
Age 27 (25.07.87)
A deep-lying midfielder, nicknamed "The Octopus", who operates just in front of the defence. Signed from Porto to do the ugly stuff in midfield.

Frank LAMPARD
Age 36 (20.06.78)
His European experience – he led Chelsea to Champions League victory in 2012 – will be a useful asset in City's bid to get past the group stage.

James MILNER
Age 28 (04.01.86)
Underrated midfield toiler who has been valued by successive City managers for his willingness to put in the hard yards down the flanks.



Samir NASRI (Fra)
Age 27 (26.06.87)
Left out of France's World Cup squad due to fears over his unsettling influence, his skill and trickery for City unsettled many a defence last season.

Jesus NAVAS (Spa)
Age 28 (21.11.85)
Dynamic winger who brings pace and width to the team. Is likely to feature more if Pellegrini decides to operate with a five-man midfield.

David SILVA (Spa)
Age 28 (08.01.86)
Clever, skilled attacking midfielder with an ability to create space in tight situations. He's the one City players look for when they win possession.

Yaya TOURE (IvC)
Age 32 (13.05.83)
Midfield powerhouse whose stunning goals and general all-round play played a vital part in helping City regain the title last season.

FORWARDS

Sergio AGUERO (Arg)
Age 26 (02.06.88)
Very strong and powerful, the diminutive striker, will be hoping to recapture his scoring form after a World Cup dogged by injury.

Edin DZEKO (Bos)
Age 28 (17.03.86)
Blessed with skill and good close control, the 6ft 4in striker is much more than just a target man. Has scored crucial goals from the bench.

Stevan JOVETIC (Mne)
Age 24 (02.11.89)
Another new signing who struggled with injury niggles last season. Always industrious, he will be looking to break up the Dzeko-Aguero partnership.

After falling foul of FIFA's Financial Fairplay rules, Manchester City had their spending restricted and a 21-man squad ruling imposed on them for this season's Champions League.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

MARIBOR

Slovenian champions match previous best

THE STADIUM

Ljudski vrt
Capacity 12,994
The stadium's name means "people's garden" in English and is situated on the banks of the river Drava.

THE COACH

Ante SIMUNDZA

Age 42 (28.09.71)
Capped three times by Slovenia and played for Maribor in the Champions League group stage in the 1999-2000 campaign.

TACTICS

Victory away to Scottish champions Celtic, after overcoming Zrinjski Mostar of Bosnia and Israel's Maccabi Tel Aviv, saw the 12-times Slovenian title winners reach the group stage for only the second time in their history.

■ Simundza says the draw for the group stage meant that his team will "play against three different styles of modern football, so we have to prepare thoroughly".

■ Damage limitation may well be the order of the day, so he will set his side up with a solid four across the back and two holding players in front of them.

■ Left-back Viler will try to get forward, while Ibraimi will provide the creativity from midfield, moving across the line and popping up behind the central striker.

■ Club icon Tavares will lead the line and may get some support from Mendy if Simundza gambles on playing two up front, as he did in the decisive away game at Celtic.

Threat...Mendy causes problems for Celtic's defence

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE GROUP STAGE IN 2000 AND THIS SEASON

GOALKEEPERS

Aljaz COTMAN
Age 20 (26.04.94)
Young reserve keeper who made his debut at the end of last season. Capped at all age groups from under-15 to under-21.

Jasmin HANDANOVIC
Age 36 (28.01.78)
First choice for his club but second for his country – behind his younger cousin, Samir Handanovic, who plays for Internazionale in Italy.

DEFENDERS

ARGHUS (Bra)
Age 26 (19.01.88)
Italo-Brazilian looking to re-establish a foothold in the first team after a long-term injury. Signed for Maribor in 2011.

Ales MEJAC
Age 31 (18.03.83)
Reliable defender now in his seventh season at the club. A full international, he was signed from Koper and has five championship medals.

Aleksander RAJCEVIC
Age 27 (17.11.86)
Near ever-present in recent seasons. Was in Slovenia's preliminary 30-man squad for the 2010 World Cup but failed to make the cut.

Petar STOJANOVIC
Age 18 (07.10.95)
Right-sided defender who is equally comfortable in midfield, he made his first-team debut at 16 and is seen as one for the future.

Marko SULER
Age 31 (09.03.83)
Quick, experienced centre-back with good aerial ability. Signed from Legia Warsaw last year and has also played in Belgium.

Dejan TRAJKOVSKI
Age 22 (14.04.92)
On the fringes of the Maribor first team. His family is of Macedonian ethnicity and he has a twin brother, Tadej, who is a goalkeeper.

Mitja VILER
Age 27 (01.09.86)
Attacking left-back who also speaks Croatian and Italian. Joined Maribor from Koper in 2010 and has made over 100 appearances since then.

Damjan VUKLISEVIC
Age 19 (28.06.95)
Under-19 international who is slowly breaking into Maribor's first-team set-up. Spent last season out on loan at second division Verze.

Ziga ZIVKO
Age 19 (21.07.95)
Has only limited first-team experience with Maribor and spent last season out on loan at Verze to get some much-needed game time.

MIDFIELDERS

Damjan BOHAR
Age 22 (18.10.91)
Goalscoring midfielder whose strikes against Celtic and Maccabi Tel Aviv helped Maribor claim a Champions League group slot.

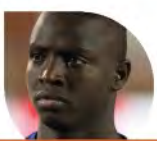
Amir DERVISEVIC
Age 22 (04.07.92)
In and out of the first team last season, he was capped by Slovenia at under-21 level, having joined Maribor from Krka in 2013.

Zeljko FILIPOVIC
Age 25 (03.10.88)
Reliable performer who is a recent addition to Slovenia's national squad. Signed from Koper in 2010, having previously been with Domzale.

Agim IBRAIMI (Mac)
Age 25 (29.08.88)
Neat and tidy playmaker who operates across the whole of midfield. Spent last season on loan to Cagliari and made 25 appearances in Serie A.

Ales MERTELJ
Age 27 (22.03.87)
A first-team regular in midfield for both Maribor and Slovenia. His older brother Sandi is a professional water polo player.

Welle N'DIAYE (Sen)
Age 24 (05.04.90)
A summer signing from Gorica, essentially an attacking midfielder who can also play on the wing or as a second striker if called upon.



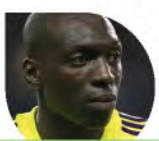
Sintayehu SALLALICH (Isr)
Age 23 (20.06.91)
Ethiopian-born winger who was a close-season arrival from Beitar Jerusalem. Played in the Maccabi Haifa side that won the Israeli league title in 2011.

Plus: Dino HOTIC (Age 19, 26.07.95), **Ranko MORAVAC** (Ser, Age 19, 25.01.95)

Dare VRSIC
Age 29 (26.09.84)
Former international who returned to Slovenia this year after a spell with Austria Vienna, where he was a league winner in 2013.

FORWARDS

Nusmir FAJIC (Bos)
Age 27 (12.01.87)
Maribor's top scorer last season, this experienced front man arrived from Mura after that club's collapse in 2012.



Jean-Philippe MENDY (Fra)
Age 27 (04.03.87)
Born in France of Senegalese descent, he began his career as a midfielder before moving forward. Needs to add some consistency to his game.

Rok SIRK
Age 20 (10.09.93)
Yet to establish himself in the first-team set-up, the under-19 international spent last season on loan at Slovenian third division side Malecnik.

Marcos TAVARES (Bra)
Age 30 (30.03.84)
The club's all-time top scorer and captain, the five-times title winner scored the goal that beat Celtic to gain a Champions League place.

Luka ZAHOVIC
Age 18 (15.11.95)
The son of Slovenia's most capped international and record goalscorer Zlatko, the Portuguese-born teen is now breaking into the first team.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

MONACO

Even financial muscle won't help at this level

THE STADIUM

Stade Louis II
Capacity 18,523
Opened in 1985, the pitch is over 26ft higher than road level and sits on top of the stadium's parking facilities.

THE COACH

Leonard JARDIM (Por)

Age 40 (01.08.74)
Replaced Claudio Ranieri in the summer after leading Sporting Lisbon back to the Champions League after an absence of five years.

TACTICS

Back in the Champions League for the first time since 2005, so reaching the knockout stage while challenging PSG in Ligue 1 would be considered a success.

■ The loss of James Rodriguez and Radamel Falcao, to Real Madrid and Manchester United, will be keenly felt by coach Jardim.

■ The new coach will have impressed Monaco's top brass with the attacking flair with which his Sporting Lisbon side finish second in Portugal last season. More of the same flair will be expected.

■ The Portuguese will employ two quick wide men to supply the ammunition for a centre-forward. Berbatov doesn't have the legs to play on the flanks, so he will most likely be used up front.

■ Either of Germain, Martial or Traore could be played up front alongside Berbatov if Jardim wants to try a different approach and switch to a 4-4-2 system.

Experience...Berbatov has signed a new one-year deal

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RUNNERS-UP IN 2004

GOALKEEPERS

Marc-Aurele CAILLARD
Age 20 (12.05.94)
Promoted to the first team squad four years ago, but very much third choice. Made his debut against Reims in 2012.

Maarten STEKELENBURG (Hol)
Age 31 (22.09.82)
Joined on loan from Fulham after a disappointing season in which his club side were relegated and he missed out on the World Cup.

Danijel SUBASIC (Cro)
Age 29 (27.10.84)
A commanding presence between the posts, he had a good season last term. Scored with a free-kick for the club in 2012.

DEFENDERS

Aymen ABDENNOUR (Tun)
Age 25 (06.08.89)
Tough, rugged and reliable central defender of whom big things are expected. Signed in July after arriving on loan from Toulouse last season.

Ricardo CARVALHO (Por)
Age 36 (18.05.78)
He may not be the all-action, niggly upsetter of strikers he once was, but still good enough to hold the defence together in his first season last term.

Abdou DIALLO
Age 18 (04.05.96)
Product of the club's academy who signed his first contract in March and will be looking to notch up some first-team appearances this season.

ELDERSON Uwa Echiejile (Nga)
Age 26 (20.01.88)
Tough-tackling left-back who has yet to establish himself. Made just five appearances last term after arriving from Braga of Portugal in January.

FABINHO (Bra)
Age 20 (23.10.93)
Right-back who made a big impression in his first season and has been re-loaned from Portuguese side Rio Ave for a second campaign.

Layvin KURZAWA
Age 21 (04.09.92)
French born, but with a Polish mother, he established himself as first-choice left-back last season. Has a knack of scoring important goals.

Borja LOPEZ (Spa)
Age 20 (02.02.94)
Underwent reconstructive knee surgery during the summer. Arrived at the start of last season and had a spell back in Spain on loan.

Andrea RAGGI (Ita)
Age 30 (24.06.84)
First-choice right-back after a journeyman career in Italy that saw him turn out for six different clubs in nine years. Joined Monaco in 2012.

WALLACE (Bra)
Age 19 (14.01.94)
Centre-back who joined Monaco on a season-long loan from Braga in Portugal. He only arrived in Europe this year after impressing for Cruzeiro.

MIDFIELDERS

Tiemoue BAKAYOKO
Age 20 (17.08.94)
Defensive midfielder of Ivorian origin who has huge potential and cost €8m despite having played less than 30 games for Rennes.

Nabil DIRAR (Mor)
Age 28 (25.02.86)
Born in Morocco, but with dual Belgian/Moroccan nationality, he has spent his career as a winger but started this season playing at right-back.

Yannick FERREIRA CARRASCO (Blg)
Age 21 (04.09.93)
Belgian winger of Spanish and Portuguese descent who has been at Monaco all his career. Roma were interested until he signed a new deal this summer.

Geoffrey KONDOGBIA
Age 21 (15.02.93)
Classy operator who has been pushing hard to break into the France team since joining Monaco from Spanish outfit Sevilla in the summer of 2013.

Joao MOUTINHO (Por)
Age 28 (08.09.86)
Offers a maturity and sense of leadership to a team that has a high percentage of young players. Valued at €25m when signed from Porto last year.

Lucas OCAMPOS (Arg)
Age 20 (11.07.94)
Has plenty of admirers since joining Monaco from River Plate in 2012 for €11m and establishing himself as a first-team regular.

FORWARDS

Bernardo SILVA (Por)
Age 20 (10.08.94)
Signed on loan from Benfica after just three senior games the previous season. He played regularly for the B team, who finished fifth in the second tier.

Jeremy TOULALAN
Age 31 (10.09.83)
Former international who returned to France last term. Scored only his second Ligue 1 goal in February – almost 10 years after his first.

Dimitar BERBATOV (Bul)
Age 33 (30.01.81)
His languid style frustrates many, but his goalscoring record stands up to scrutiny. Arrived in January and signed a one-year deal this summer.

Valere GERMAIN
Age 24 (17.04.90)
The son of former France international Bruno Germain, he is now in his ninth season with Monaco and is the club's longest-serving player.

Anthony MARTIAL
Age 18 (05.12.95)
Highly rated, he was signed from Lyon for €5m last year and, following groin surgery this summer, he should be rested and ready to push on.

Lacina TRAORE (IvC)
Age 24 (20.05.90)
Stands 6ft 8in and dubbed "The Gentle Giant", he was on loan to Everton last year, where injury limited him to just one Premier League game.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

OLYMPIAKOS

Dominant at home but do not travel well

THE STADIUM

Karaiskakis Stadium
Capacity 32,115
Rebuilt in 2004 and stands on the same site as the old stadium – although it faces in the opposite direction.

THE COACH

MICHEL (Spa)
Age 51 (23.03.63)
A UEFA Cup winner for two consecutive seasons with Real Madrid, beating Videoton (1985) and Cologne (1986) in the Finals.

TACTICS

They may have been national champions for nine of the past 10 seasons but they are rarely able to turn domestic dominance into convincing form outside Greece.

■ Michel is happiest setting up in a 4-2-3-1 shape, When his side have the bit between their teeth, this can quickly transform into a 4-1-2-3. Nominal defensive midfielder Kasami will push forward to join Mitroglou in the creative department, with Afellay and Dossevi playing as out-and-out wingers.

■ The coach insists that managing his team's emotions is more important than picking the side. As long as his charges keep good possession and play aggressively and complex-free, he will be delighted.

■ The loss of central defender Kostas Manolas, who was sold to Roma for €13m in the week of the group stage draw, had always been on the cards.

Newcomer...Kasami is one of several signings

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUARTER-FINALISTS IN 1999

GROUP A Greece

GOALKEEPERS

Balazs MEGYERI (Hun)
Age 24 (31.03.90)
Former Hungary under-21 international who used to play for Bristol City's youth team. Joined Olympiakos in 2010 from Ferencvaros.

ROBERTO (Spa)
Age 28 (10.02.86)
Signed a permanent deal in February after being on loan from Atletico Madrid. Cost €6m and has signed a four-year deal.

DEFENDERS

Eric ABIDAL (Fra)
Age 34 (11.09.79)
Central defender who had a liver transplant in 2012, the year after the discovery of a tumour. Champions League winner at Barcelona in 2011.

Tasos AVLONITIS
Age 24 (01.01.90)
Former Greek under-19 central defender who joined Olympiakos from Panionios this season as cover after the sale of Manolas.

Alberto BOTIA (Spa)
Age 25 (27.01.89)
Central defender who played just one first-team game during his time at Barcelona. In the Spain squad that won Euro Under-21 title in 2011.

Omar ELABDELLAOUI (Nor)
Age 22 (05.12.91)
Right-back who failed to play a game when at Manchester City. Signed from German club Eintracht Braunschweig, who were relegated last season.

Kostas GIANNOULIS
Age 26 (09.12.87)
Left-back who arrived from Atromitos this season. Made one international appearance and had a spell in Germany with Cologne.

Arthur MASUAKU (Fra)
Age 20 (07.11.93)
Capped at junior level by France, the left-back was signed from Valenciennes in July. He can also operate in midfield if required.

Leandro SALINO (Bra)
Age 29 (22.04.85)
Right-sided midfielder who now plays at full-back, he was on the bench when previous club Braga lost in the 2011 Europa League Final.

Dimitris SIOVAS
Age 25 (16.09.88)
Tough Greece international centre-back who missed the World Cup through injury. Strong tackler, good in the air and passes well.

MIDFIELDERS

Andreas BOUCHALAKIS
Age 21 (05.04.93)
Under-21 international who is considered to be one of the brightest young talents in the Greek game. Signed from Ergotelis in the summer.

Jimmy DURMAZ (Swe)
Age 25 (22.03.89)
Swedish international winger signed from Genclerbirligi at the end of August. Used to play under the name of "Jimmy Touma".

Alejandro DOMINGUEZ (Arg)
Age 33 (10.06.81)
Playmaker who was in the Argentina squad that won the 2001 Under-20 World Cup, but never won a senior cap. Used to have a fear of flying.

Mathieu DOSSEVI (Fra)
Age 26 (12.02.88)
Right winger signed this summer. His older brother, Thomas, is a Togo international and it seems he could now be persuaded to switch nationality.

Kostas FORTOUNIS
Age 21 (16.10.92)
Left Olympiakos as a youth but has now returned after six years away, including three seasons spent in Germany with Kaiserslautern.

David FUSTER (Spa)
Age 32 (03.02.82)
Attacking midfielder who has been in Greece since 2010. Always contributes his share of goals, he can play in behind a central striker.

Gevorg GHAZARYAN (Arm)
Age 26 (05.04.88)
Quick and technically sound right-winger, he won five successive Armenian league championships with Pyunik early in his career.

Pajtim KASAMI (Swi)
Age 22 (02.06.92)
Signed a three-year contract with Olympiakos in July for an undisclosed fee following Fulham's relegation from the Premier League.

Giannis MANIATIS
Age 27 (12.10.86)
Midfield enforcer who is strong in the tackle and has plenty of stamina. Likes to shoot from distance. Often plays at right-back for the national side.

Luka MILIVOJEVIC (Ser)
Age 23 (07.04.91)
Defensive midfielder with a decent range of passing and tactical awareness. On loan from Anderlecht, he made his debut for Rad Belgrade at 16.

Delvin N'DINGA (Con)
Age 26 (14.03.88)
Currently in his second season on loan from Monaco. An established member of Congo's national set-up, he won his first cap in 2007.

FORWARDS

Ibrahim AFELLAY (Hol)
Age 28 (02.04.86)
On loan from Barcelona, he spent the previous campaign at Schalke. Was a late sub in Barca's 2011 Champions League Final victory.

Jorge BENITEZ (Par)
Age 21 (02.09.92)
Won his first international cap, against France, in June and joined Olympiakos from Paraguayan side Guarani two months later.

Kostas MITROGLOU
Age 26 (12.03.88)
Started just one game for Fulham following his £12.4m move from Olympiakos in January. Now back in Greece on loan.

Plus: Dimitris DIAMANTAKOS (Age 21, 05.03.93)

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

FFP ruling could hurt chances of success

THE STADIUM

Parc des Princes
Capacity 48,712
To be fair, the Parc has seen better days and the refurbishment for Euro 2016 is long overdue.

THE COACH

Laurent BLANC

Age 48 (19.11.65)
His low-key style may not suit such a high-profile club, but results clearly count and last term he won Ligue 1 and the French League Cup.

TACTICS

While domestic success is a must, appetite for success won't be diminished by falling foul of FIFA's Financial Fairplay rules and the club's Qatari owners will expect at least a repetition of last season's run to the quarter-finals.

■ Blanc rarely strayed from 4-3-3 last term and never really resolved the thorny issue of how to get Cavani and Ibrahimovic to work together up front.

■ Although not fatal, the departure to Milan of central defender Alex and playmaker Jeremy Menez has weakened the strength in depth of the squad, with Luiz the only big-name addition during the summer. More worrying was the loss of 18-year-old Kingsley Coman to Juventus after just four first-team games.

■ Ibrahimovic's 41 goals in 46 games last season tell you everything you need to know about the 32-year-old Swede's importance to PSG.

Distinctive...Luiz joined before a disappointing World Cup

■ CHAMPIONS LEAGUE SEMI-FINALISTS IN 1995

GOALKEEPERS

Nicolas DOUCHEZ
Age 34 (22.04.80)
Arrived in 2011 with a big reputation, but has started only a handful of games. Played in the League Cup win last season.

Salvatore SIRIGU (Ita)
Age 27 (12.01.87)
Joined at the start of the Qatari revolution in 2011 and has been a first-choice ever since. Played against England in the World Cup.

DEFENDERS

Serge AURIER (IvC)
Age 21 (24.12.92)
Voted the best right-back in France last season, his arrival on loan from Toulouse, rather than permanently, is a way around FFP restrictions.

Zoumana CAMARA
Age 35 (03.04.79)
Central defender who has played over 200 games for the club. Might not be start many more, although he did sign a new one-year deal in May.

Lucas DIGNE
Age 21 (20.07.93)
Has moved ahead of Maxwell in the race for the left-back slot since arriving last season with a reputation as one of France's hottest young prospects.

David LUIZ (Bra)
Age 27 (22.04.87)
A World Cup nightmare saw his €50m price tag questioned, but playing alongside Silva should see him settle quickly. Can play in midfield if needed.

MARQUINHOS (Bra)
Age 20 (14.05.94)
A €31.4m price tag and a five-year deal for a teenager shows the esteem in which he was held when PSG signed him from Roma last year.

MAXWELL (Bra)
Age 33 (27.08.81)
Hasn't been an unqualified success since arriving from Barcelona and will probably have to content himself with a bit-part role this season.

Thiago SILVA (Bra)
Age 29 (22.09.84)
PSG's captain and talisman, he has a case to be called the world's best defender and was a towering presence at centre-half last season.

Gregory VAN DER WIEL (Hol)
Age 26 (03.02.88)
Right-back who enjoyed a better second season with PSG until a knee injury at the of the campaign ruled him out of the World Cup.

MIDFIELDERS

Yohan CABAYE
Age 28 (14.01.86)
Signed in mid-season last term and proved himself to be a quality addition in an area where competition for places is fierce.

Clement CHANTOME
Age 27 (11.09.87)
Spent last season on loan at Toulouse, but now back with the club he joined in 2006, battling it out to impose himself and win a midfield slot.

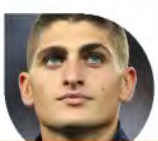
LUCAS Moura (Bra)
Age 22 (13.08.92)
Opted for France ahead of England and Italy when leaving Sao Paulo in January 2013. His €45m fee carries with it huge responsibility.

Blaise MATUIDI
Age 27 (09.04.87)
Belies his skinny frame with powerhouse performances in the PSG engine room. Joined before the Qataris arrived and has been a revelation since.

Thiago MOTTA (Ita)
Age 32 (28.08.82)
After a bad time with injuries the Brazilian-born Italy cap is a wise head who continues to turn in some fine performances in the midfield holding role.

Javier PASTORE (Arg)
Age 25 (20.06.89)
Gifted individual who delights and infuriates in equal measure. At €39.8m from Italian side Palermo in 2011, the jury is still very much out.

Adrien RABIOT
Age 19 (03.04.95)
Powerful teenager who made 34 appearances in a star-studded team last season. Blighted by a tricky heel injury at the start of this campaign.



Marco VERRATTI (Ita)
Age 21 (05.11.92)
Neat and tidy, he balances the team and makes them tick. Was named Ligue 1's young player of the year at the end of last season.

FORWARDS

Edinson CAVANI (Uru)
Age 27 (14.02.87)
Arrived in 2013 for €64.5m, but despite scoring 25 goals in 43 games he was often required to play second fiddle to Ibrahimovic.

Zlatan IBRAHIMOVIC (Swe)
Age 32 (03.10.81)
Hugely confident, he is the only player to score for six different clubs in the Champions League. Has said he expects to retire at the end of next season.

Ezequiel LAVEZZI (Arg)
Age 29 (03.05.85)
A tireless worker with a low centre of gravity that makes him hard to stop. Not a prolific goalscorer, which some critics hold against him.

After falling foul of FIFA's Financial Fairplay rules, Paris Saint-Germain had their spending restricted and a 21-man squad ruling imposed on them for this season's Champions League.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

PORTO

New coach adopts Spanish approach

THE STADIUM

Estadio do Dragao
Capacity 50,431
The second-biggest ground in Portugal, it staged five games at Euro 2004 – including a semi-final.

THE COACH

Julen LOPETEGUI (Spa)

Age 48 (28.08.66)
Former sports commentator who worked with Spain's youth teams before taking the Porto job in May. Played at the 1994 World Cup.

TACTICS

A disappointing domestic third last term season saw Lopetegui reinforce the squad on his arrival during the summer mostly with acquisitions from his homeland.

■ Although loosely sticking to the club's default 4-3-3 set-up, the new coach is intent on implementing a discernibly more possession-based game, as opposed to the counter-attacking approach employed for most of the past decade in the Champions League.

■ Having failed to win any of their three home games in last season's group stage, Lopetegui will be expected to be more dominant on home soil this time. As someone born in the province of Gipuzkoa, in the autonomous community of the Basque Country in northern Spain, the game in Bilbao will be extra special for him.

■ Teenage sensation Neves burst onto the scene at the start of this season and looks set to keep his place for the European campaign.

Anchor...Herreira plays an important role in midfield

■ EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS IN 1987 AND 2004

GROUP H Portugal

GOALKEEPERS

FABIANO (Bra)
Age 26 (29.02.88)
Signed in May 2012 from Portuguese side Olhanense, having started out with Sao Paulo in his homeland and had several loan spells.

Andres FERNANDEZ (Spa)
Age 27 (17.12.86)
Courageous former Osasuna keeper who was hand-picked as part of the new coach's "Spanish revolution". Has a €30m buyout clause.

DEFENDERS

Jose ANGEL (Spa)
Age 25 (05.09.89)
Former Spain under-21 international, the left-back is looking to re-launch his career after a forgettable year at Roma.

DANILO (Bra)
Age 23 (15.07.91)
Right-back who has been capped by his country at senior level and played in the 2012 Olympic Games. Signed from Santos for €13m.

MAICON (Bra)
Age 26 (14.09.88)
Central defender who also filled in at right-back early in his Porto career. Moved to Portugal in 2008, initially playing for Nacional.

Ivan MARCANO (Spa)
Age 27 (23.06.87)
Central defender signed from Rubin Kazan to replace Eliaquim Mangala who joined Manchester City. Spent last season on loan to Olympiakos.

Bruno MARTINS INDI (Hol)
Age 22 (08.02.92)
Physically imposing centre-back who takes no prisoners and enjoyed an impressive World Cup for Holland. Can play left-back if needed.

Daniel OPARE (Gha)
Age 23 (18.10.90)
Marauding right-back endowed with impressive speed and excellent crossing ability. Failed to make the grade after joining Real Madrid as a teenager.

Diego REYES (Mex)
Age 21 (19.09.92)
Central defender who was a gold medal winner at the London Olympics two years ago, where he played in every game for Mexico.

Alex SANDRO (Bra)
Age 23 (26.01.91)
Left-back who moved to Porto from Santos at the same time as left-back Danilo. Won caps at senior international level.

MIDFIELDERS

Mikel AGU (Nga)
Age 21 (27.05.93)
Made his debut in February and became the first Nigerian player to appear for Porto's first team in the club's 120-year history.

Yacine BRAHIMI (Alg)
Age 24 (08.02.90)
Skilful, quick and hard-working, he hit the ground running at Porto with his early showings making him arguably the most successful summer acquisition.

CASEMIRO (Bra)
Age 22 (23.02.92)
Strong in the tackle, and a fine passer with impressive lung-power, he is on loan from Real Madrid and set to play a big role this season.

EVANDRO (Bra)
Age 28 (23.08.86)
Classy playmaker who also has a keen eye for goal. Was the heartbeat behind Estoril's emergence as a force in Portuguese club football.

Hector HERRERA (Mex)
Age 24 (19.04.90)
Had a fine first season with Porto last time out after arriving from Pachuca. Can anchor the midfield or play box to box.

KELVIN (Bra)
Age 21 (01.06.93)
Winger who joined Porto at the age of 18 and spent a season on loan with Rio Ave. Had previously played in the Brazilian second division.

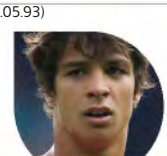
Ruben NEVES
Age 17 (13.03.97)
Has surpassed Cristiano Ronaldo as the youngest Portuguese ever to play in the Champions League. Scored on his first-team debut in August.

Ricardo PEREIRA
Age 20 (06.10.93)
Winger who prefers the right flank and can also deputise at full-back. Capped by Portugal at under-21 level, he was signed from Guimaraes.

Plus: Jose CAMPANA (Spa, Age 21, 31.05.93)

FORWARDS

Juan QUINTERO (Col)
Age 21 (18.01.93)
Highly rated talent who made his international debut at the age of 19. Had a season in Italy with Pescara before joining Porto last year.



Oliver TORRES (Spa)
Age 19 (10.11.94)
Mobile, hard-working and talented midfielder who always looks for the ball. Currently on loan from Atletico Madrid.

ADRIAN Lopez (SPA)
Age 26 (08.01.88)
Mobile front man who is looking to get his career back on track. Yet to fulfil his undoubted promise, he arrived from Atletico Madrid.

Jackson MARTINEZ (Col)
Age 27 (03.10.86)
An out-and-out goalscorer who has been the Portuguese league's top scorer for the past two seasons. Previously with Jaguares in Mexico.

Ricardo QUARESMA
Age 30 (26.09.83)
Skilful veteran whose ability has seen him play for the likes of Barcelona, Internazionale and Chelsea. Returned for a second spell at Porto this year.

Cristian TELLO (Spa)
Age 23 (11.08.91)
The club's marquee signing this summer, arriving on loan from Barcelona, the wide man oozes class and causes headaches for the best defences.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

REAL MADRID

Having won "*la decima*", now for an 11th title

THE STADIUM

Santiago Bernabeu Stadium
Capacity 85,454
One of football's most iconic stadiums, it has hosted four European Cup Finals and the 1982 World Cup Final.

THE COACH

Carlo ANCELOTTI (Ita)

Age 55 (10.06.59)
Jose Mourinho's replacement returned flair, hope, some star signings, and a 10th European Cup to the Bernabeu.

TACTICS

The defending champions have already added the UEFA Super Cup to the trophy haul, beating Sevilla 2-0 in Cardiff.

■ The big tactical question is how the coach plans to accomodate his new signing Rodriguez. The Colombian's natural position is as a no10 but that role didn't really feature in Ancelotti's set-up last season. The player he's most likely to replace, Angel Di Maria, played a deeper role before moving on to Mancheter United in August, coming in from the flanks. A subtle adaptation of his 4-2-3-1 formation could be the answer.

■ The arrival of Rodriguez may also mean an unfaimilar role for Real's other big summer signing, Kroos. Accustomed to taking up an attacking midfield role both for Bayern Munich and Germany, the World Cup winner is likely to be played in a far deeper position alongside Modric.

Real deal...Rodriguez is the latest galactico

■ EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS IN 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1966, 1998, 2000, 2002 AND 2014

GOALKEEPERS

Iker CASILLAS
Age 33 (20.05.81)
The club captain is a Real legend but an increasing number of mistakes and a shocking World Cup mean his place is under threat.

Keylor NAVAS (CR)
Age 27 (15.12.86)
Unlike Casillas, he enjoyed an outstanding World Cup, performing heroics for Costa Rica during their shock run to the quarter-finals.

Fernando PACHECO
Age 22 (18.05.92)
Joined Real as a 14-year-old and has been promoted to the senior squad this season after impressive displays for the club's B and C teams.

DEFENDERS

Alvaro ARBELOA
Age 31 (17.01.83)
Assumed the right-back role after Ramos's switch to the centre, the former Liverpool man began this season as understudy to Carvajal.

Daniel CARVAJAL
Age 22 (11.01.92)
Returned to the Bernabeu in 2013 after one highly successful season at Bayer Leverkusen. He now looks set to be a regular in the back four.

Fabio COENTRAO (Por)
Age 26 (11.04.88)
Now recovered after picking up a nasty injury in the World Cup, he is set to renew his fierce rivalry with Marcelo for the starting left-back berth.

MARCELO (Bra)
Age 26 (12.05.88)
Technically-gifted and attacking left-back who scored the opening goal of the World Cup – unfortunately it was in his own net.

NACHO Fernandez
Age 24 (18.01.90)
Central defender who got his chance last season and made three appearances in the Champions League. Signed a new six-year contract in July.

PEPE (Por)
Age 31 (26.02.83)
A commanding physical presence with an acute positional sense, the centre-half can be let down by his suspect temperament.

Sergio RAMOS
Age 28 (30.03.86)
The youngest ever European player to win 100 caps, he continues to be a defensive mainstay for club and country – and also scores key goals.

Raphael VARANE (Fra)
Age 21 (25.04.93)
The young centre-back is tipped for big things – and sports daily *Marca* even included him in their team of Real's best ever foreigners.

MIDFIELDERS

Gareth BALE (Wal)
Age 25 (16.07.89)
The world's costliest player had a fine debut season and will be again hoping to mix explosive pace down the flanks with plenty of goals.

BURGUI
Age 20 (29.10.93)
A winger who has been with the club since March 2012 and has made steady progress through the ranks, joining the first-team squad last season.

Asier ILLARRAMENDI
Age 24 (08.03.90)
The defensive midfielder became Real's most expensive-ever Spanish player when he moved from Real Sociedad for €32.2 million.

ISCO
Age 22 (21.04.92)
Hailed as the "next big thing" after signing from Malaga, the playmaker has had few chances to shine due to Real's focus on a 4-3-3 formation.

Sami KHEDIRA (Ger)
Age 27 (04.04.87)
Became only the 10th player to win the Champions League and World Cup in the same year, but missed the Final in Brazil with a calf injury.

Toni KROOS (Ger)
Age 24 (04.01.90)
Won three Bundesligas in four seasons with Bayern Munich and the Champions League in 2013. An ever-present as Germany won the World Cup.

Luka MODRIC (Cro)
Age 29 (09.09.95)
An influential figure in midfield since arriving from Spurs, he underlined his continuing importance by signing a new four-yeal deal last month.

James RODRIGUEZ (Col)
Age 23 (12.07.91)
The top scorer at the World Cup and many people's choice for player of the tournament, right now he is football's hottest property.

FORWARDS

Karim BENZEMA (Fra)
Age 26 (19.12.87)
His ability to create space for Bale and Ronaldo to run into has made him a key member of the team. Signed a new five-year deal in August.

Javier HERNANDEZ (Mex)
Age 26 (01.06.88)
Nicknamed "*Chicharito*" (little pea), the centre-forward spent much of his time as an impact substitute at Manchester United before his summer move.

JESE
Age 21 (26.02.93)
The young striker impressed last season until he tore a cruciate knee ligament in a Champions League game against Schalke.

Eero MARKKANEN (Fin)
Age 23 (03.07.91)
Real's reserve manager Zinedine Zidane was impressed enough to sign the bustling Finnish striker from AIK during the summer.

Cristiano RONALDO (Por)
Age 29 (05.02.85)
The World Player of the Year got this season off to a perfect start by scoring both goals in Real's European Super Cup win over compatriots Sevilla.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

ROMA

Serie A runners-up have stylish ambitions

THE STADIUM

STADIO OLIMPICO
Capacity 82,300
Italy's largest arena remains Roma's home but plans are afoot for a new €300m purpose-built stadium.

THE COACH

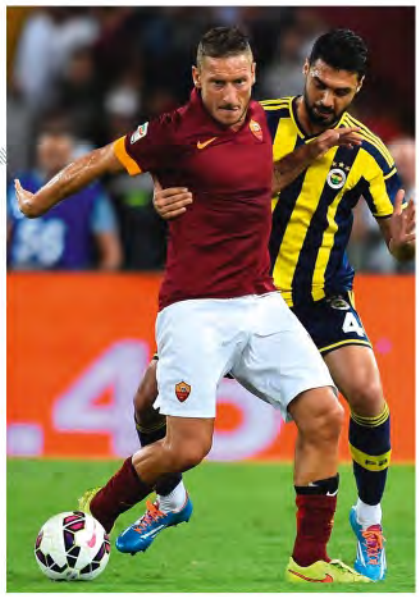
Rudi GARCIA (Fra)

Age 50 (20.02.64)
Appointed with little fanfare last year and amid initial scepticism from the Roma "ambiente", but Garcia has quickly been accepted.

TACTICS

Roma played some terrific football last season to finish second to Juventus with 85 points, a haul which in five of the last seven seasons would have won them the title. It remains to be seen if their new players – Cole (Chelsea), Iturbe (Verona) and Manolas (Olympiakos) – are good enough to see them progress in Europe. Last season's best player, Moroccan defender Mehdi Benatia (sold to Bayern Munich), may be missed.

■ Expect Garcia to field an attacking 4-3-3 line-up in which the De Rossi-Pjanic-Strootman midfield makes the most of the Iturbe-Totti-Gervinho attack. The Frenchman, however, is sure to surprise us, perhaps by playing someone like midfielder Florenzi as an overlapping full-back. Roma find themselves reliant on an ageing midfield schemer in the shape of Totti. Against Bayern Munich and Manchester City, life might be tough for the "old man".



Loyal...Totti has spent his entire career with Roma

■ EUROPEAN CUP RUNNERS-UP IN 1984

GROUP E Italy

GOALKEEPERS

Morgan DE SANCTIS
Age 37 (26.03.77)
Experienced keeper signed from Napoli in 2013. Long-term deputy to Gianluigi Buffon in Italian national side.

Bogdan LOBONT (Rom)
Age 36 (18.01.78)
Quick-witted keeper who is a regular for Romania (more than 80 caps) but has been a reserve in Rome. Signed from Dinamo Bucharest in 2009.

DEFENDERS

Davide ASTORI
Age 27 (07.01.87)
Centre-back on loan from Cagliari who was snatched from under the noses of rivals Lazio. Capped by Italy but error-prone and card happy.

Federico BALZARETTI
Age 32 (06.12.81)
Attacking left-back who is married to glamorous actress Eleonaro Abbagnato. Previously with Palermo, Torino, Juventus and Fiorentina. Currently injured.

Leandro CASTAN (Bra)
Age 27 (05.11.86)
Centre-back who has become a regular fixture since 2012 transfer from Corinthians. Formed a strong partnership with Benatia last season.

Ashley COLE (Eng)
Age 33 (20.12.80)
Hoping to become the first Englishman to win the Scudetto for 100 years, the former Chelsea left-back won the Champions League in 2012.

MAICON (Bra)
Age 33 (26.07.81)
Right-back who has revived his career in Rome after a blip at Manchester City. Won the Champions League with Internazionale in 2010.

Kostas MANOLAS (Gre)
Age 23 (14.06.91)
Centre-half signed from Roma for €13m to replace Mehdi Benatia. Played every minute in Greece's run to the last 16 of the World Cup.

Alessio ROMAGNOLI
Age 19 (12.01.95)
Product of Roma's youth systen who was pressed into service as a left-back last season but is more comfortable in the centre of defence.

Vasilis TOROSIDIS (Gre)
Age 29 (10.06.85)
Greek international who can play in a number of positions but has been used mostly at right-back. Signed from Olympiakos in 2013.

MIDFIELDERS

Daniele DE ROSSI
Age 31 (24.07.83)
Arguably Roma's best player. Can alternate between central midfield and central defence. Father Alberto is a youth coach at Roma.

Urby EMANUELSON (Hol)
Age 28 (16.06.86)
Left-sided midfielder who arrived on a free after his contract with Milan expired. A full international, he was a Euro Under-21 winner in 2006.

Plus: Jose HOLEBAS (Gre, Age 30, 27.06.84)

Alessandro FLORENZI
Age 23 (11.03.91)
Highly-rated Rome-born youth team product who flourished last season in a wide role but can also play centrally.

Seydou KEITA (Mli)
Age 34 (16.01.90)
Experienced former Barcelona midfielder who joined Roma on a year-long deal this summer after a six-month spell in Spain with Valencia.

Radja NAINGGOLAN (Blg)
Age 26 (04.05.88)
Belgian-born midfielder who has spent his entire career in Italy. On the fringes of the Belgium squad, he joined Roma in January this year.

Leandro PAREDES (Arg)
Age 20 (29.06.94)
Young attacking midfielder who joined from Boca Juniors in January and was shunted out on loan to Chievo where he barely featured.

Miralem PJANIC (Bos)
Age 24 (02.04.90)
Talented playmaker who was outstanding last season. Signed a contract extension this summer to deter interest from England and Spain.

Kevin STROOTMAN (Hol)
Age 24 (13.02.90)
Dutch international who missed the World Cup with a serious knee injury. Linked with a move to Manchester United this coming January.

Salih UCAN (Tur)
Age 20 (06.01.94)
Signed on a two-year loan from Fenerbahce in the summer with an €11m buy-out option. Made his Turkey debut last November.

FORWARDS

Mattia DESTRO
Age 23 (20.03.91)
Highly rated striker who was Roma's top scorer last season with 13 league goals. Came through Internazionale's youth system before joining Genoa.

GERVINHO (IvC)
Age 27 (27.05.87)
Former Arsenal forward who has been reborn in Italy. His pace, allied to Totti's passing ability, proved consistently devastating last season.

Juan ITURBE (Arg)
Age 21 (04.06.93)
Diminutive winger who signed from Verona this summer for €22m after being close to joining Juventus. An exceptional dribbler.

Adem LJAJIC (Ser)
Age 22 (29.09.91)
Lively attacker who has mostly been used as a sub since joining from Fiorentina in 2013. Work permit issues scuppered a 2010 transfer to Manchester United.

Francesco TOTTI
Age 37 (27.09.76)
He may be be 38 years old but he can still hit the telling pass whilst he remains the reference point for the entire team. Won Serie A with Roma in 2001.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

SCHALKE

Three-in-a row last 16 is the aim again

THE STADIUM

Veltins-Arena
Capacity 54,442
Combines technological advances, such as a slide-out pitch, with a blast-furnace wall of sound.

THE COACH

Jens KELLER

Age 43 (24.11.70)
Happier working on the training ground than being in front of the cameras, where he cuts a rather grey and ill-at-ease figure.

TACTICS

The Gelsenkirchen outfit are a club steeped in tradition, with a loyal, working-class fan base. The team has reached the last 16 in each of the previous two tournaments and more of the same would suffice.

■ The club has a reputation for gritty, all-action football – along with a productive youth programme and boardroom infighting.

■ Keller's default setting is a 4-2-3-1 which in the attacking phase morphs into a 4-3-3 with the wide midfielders pushing on.

■ This season he wants his side to play with more variation, so the coach could well roll out a 4-4-2 or 4-1-4-1 on occasion.

■ Should an extra striker be required to play alongside Huntelaar, summer signing Choupo-Moting is likely to get the nod.

■ First-choice left-back Kolasinac tore cruciate ligaments in his right knee in the opening game of the season and is out until March. Fuchs will take his place.

Versatile...centre-half Howedes has played at full-back

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE SEMI-FINALISTS IN 2011

GOALKEEPERS

Ralf FAHRMANN
Age 25 (27.09.88)
Took over from veteran Timo Hildebrand last season and his penchant for clean sheets were crucial to the club's third-place finish.

Fabian GIEFER
Age 24 (17.05.90)
Arrived in July from Fortuna Dusseldorf to challenge Fahrmann, but was ruled out until October with an abductor-muscle injury.

DEFENDERS

Dennis AOGO
Age 27 (14.01.87)
Full-back signed from Hamburg in February, despite suffering a long-term ACL injury in November while on loan at Schalke.

Kaan AYHAN (Tur)
Age 19 (10.11.94)
Born in Gelsenkirchen, he represented the country of his birth and that of his parents at youth level before opting for Turkey at under-21 level.

Marvin FRIEDRICH
Age 18 (13.12.95)
Central defender who was a member of Germany's Euro Under-19 squad this summer. Can also fill in at full-back on either flank.

Christian FUCHS (Aut)
Age 28 (07.04.86)
Left-back who has fallen down the pecking order. A good crosser of the ball and dangerous from free-kicks. Captains his national team.

Benedikt HOWEDES
Age 26 (29.02.88)
Captain and central defender who has spent all his career at Schalke. Picked at left-back in the World Cup, where he played every single minute.

Jan KIRCHHOFF
Age 23 (01.10.90)
Centre-back who is on an 18-month loan from Bayern Munich which ends in June 2015. Can also play as a defensive midfielder.

Joel MATIP (Cam)
Age 23 (08.08.91)
Made his debut in midfield at 18 but now preferred as a central defender. Born in Germany but chose to play for the country of his father.

Felipe SANTANA (Bra)
Age 28 (17.03.86)
Back-up central defender who made the switch from arch-rivals Dortmund at the start of last season. Needs to improve his passing.

Atsuto UCHIDA (Jap)
Age 26 (27.03.88)
Although not particularly quick or creative, he likes to get forward from right-back. His heading and tackling are not of the highest quality.

MIDFIELDERS

Kevin-Prince BOATENG (Gha)
Age 27 (06.03.87)
Berlin-born, he is the archetypal maverick, veering from an incorrigible bad boy to game-changing engine room dynamo.

Plus: Sead KOLASINAC (Bos, Age 21, 20.06.93)

Christian CLEMENS
Age 23 (04.08.91)
Able to operate on either flank, he possesses pace and a decent shot. Has been capped by Germany at all junior levels up to under-21.

Julian DRAXLER
Age 20 (20.09.93)
Attacking midfielder who has plenty of suitors, he played just 14 minutes at the World Cup but has already captained Germany's national team.

Jefferson FARFAN (Per)
Age 29 (26.10.84)
Underwent an operation in the summer after failing to shake off a knee injury that limited him to 19 Bundesliga appearances last season.

Leon GORETZKA
Age 19 (06.02.95)
Made his breakthrough into the first team last season and Schalke's director of sport Horst Heldt now says he is "not for sale at any price".

Marco HOGER
Age 25 (16.09.89)
Defensive midfielder who is also happy at right-back. Missed most of last season after tearing a cruciate ligament in his right knee.

Max MEYER
Age 18 (18.09.95)
Attacking midfielder who had a fine season last time out, so much so that he made his debut for Germany in a friendly against Poland in May.

Roman NEUSTADTER
Age 26 (18.02.88)
Defensive midfielder who makes up for his lack of technical prowess with a great work ethic and understanding of the game.

Sidney SAM
Age 26 (31.01.88)
Goalscoring winger who turned down previous offers to play for his father's homeland, Nigeria, in order to represent Germany at senior level.

Leroy SANE
Age 18 (11.01.96)
Son of former Senegal striker Souleyman Sane, he signed a two-year contract in March after impressing in last season's UEFA Youth League.

FORWARDS

Eric-Maxim CHOUPO-MOTING (Cam)
Age 25 (23.03.89)
Central striker who was born in Hamburg but played in all three of Cameroon's World Cup games in Brazil. Joined on a free from Mainz in July.

Klaas-Jan HUNTELAAR (Hol)
Age 31 (12.08.83)
A penalty-box predator who arrived at Schalke for €14m after indifferent spells at Real Madrid and Milan. Has had knee problems.

Chinedu OBASI (Nga)
Age 28 (01.06.86)
Although his career has been hampered by injury, he is the only Nigerian to play at Under-17, Under-20 and senior World Cups, as well as the Olympics.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

SHAKHTAR DONETSK

Disrupted by civil unrest in home city

THE STADIUM

Arena Lviv
Capacity 32,767
Due to military action in the country, the club will be playing in western Ukraine at this Euro 2012 stadium.

THE COACH

Mircea LUCESCU (Rom)
Age 69 (29.07.45)
Somewhat surprisingly decided to stay this summer after being locked in talks with the club's owner Rinat Akhmetov.

TACTICS

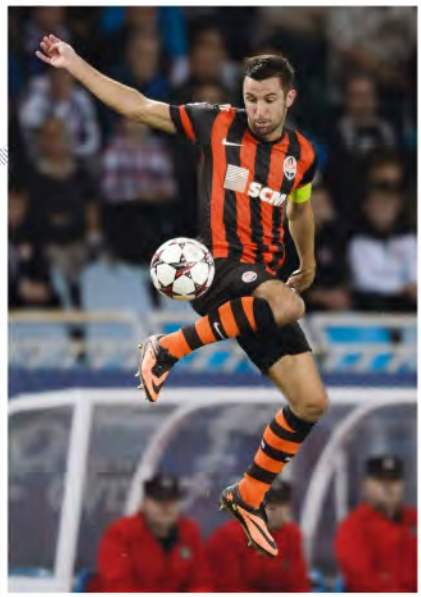
Forced to play domestic and continental home gates away from Donetsk, the club have also had serious problems off the pitch in the build-up to the new season.

■ Attracting new players has, of course, been difficult, while six of the foreigners in the squad – including Costa, Teixeira, Fred and Ismaily – initially refused to return to the Ukraine after a friendly against Lyon.

■ The club are now based in Kiev, where players now live and train, and they have persuaded the South American players to return, while even reinforcing the squad by signing left-back Azevedo and midfielder Marlos.

■ Srna remains a hugely influential figure, while Teixeira dictates the pace of the Shakhtar game.

■ Lucescu's team play at speed, with emphasis placed on great individual skills, with the midfield engine room composed exclusively of Brazilian players.



Influential...club captain Srna is a hugely popular figure

GOALKEEPERS

Anton KANIBOLOTSKIY
Age 26 (16.05.88)
Very promising keeper who has emerged a real contender for a place in the starting line-up since from Dnipro in 2012.

Andriy PYATOV
Age 30 (28.06.84)
Current first choice for the national team, who has lost and then regained his place in the side several times since joining in 2007.

DEFENDERS

Marcio AZEVEDO (Bra)
Age 27 (05.02.86)
Left-back signed this summer from Metalist Kharkiv. Easily adapted to the Ukrainian game after moving in 2013 from Botafogo.

Dmytro CHYGRYNSKIY
Age 26 (07.11.86)
Injury-prone central defender who has looked unconvincing since his return in 2010 from Barcelona. Now only used as a back-up.

ISMAILY (Bra)
Age 24 (11.01.90)
Left-back who moved to Portugal at the age of 19. Played in the Champions League for Braga and joined Shakhtar last year.

Serhiy KRYVTSOV
Age 23 (15.03.91)
Talented central defender or holding midfielder, but has failed to win a starting place so far after joining from Metalurh Zaporizhya in 2010.

Olexandr KUCHER
Age 30 (22.10.82)
Vastly experienced central defender, born in Kiev but overlooked by Dynamo. Industrious and battling, he was signed in 2006 from Metalist.

Ivan ORDETS
Age 22 (08.07.92)
Central defender who returned to Shakhtar this season after spending last term on loan at Illichivets Mariupol. Scored on his international debut in May.

Yaroslav RAKITSKIY
Age 25 (03.08.89)
Powerful central defender who could be used in midfield defensive role. Current Ukraine international, he has a strong long-distance shot.

Vyacheslav SHEVCHUK
Age 35 (13.05.79)
Veteran left-back who is still in great physical shape. Established himself as the clear first choice after the departure of Romania's Razvan Rat.

Darijo SRNA (Cro)
Age 32 (01.05.82)
Very quick and skilful down the right flank. Club captain and an inspirational dressing room-motivator. Dangerous from free-kicks.

MIDFIELDERS

BERNARD (Bra)
Age 20 (08.09.92)
Agile dribbler signed in August 2013 for a club record €25m after winning the Libertadores Cup with Atletico Mineiro.

Douglas COSTA (Bra)
Age 22 (14.09.90)
In the shadow of his compatriot Willian after joining from Gremio in 2010. His trademarks are speed and typical Brazilian touch.

FERNANDO (Bra)
Age 21 (03.03.92)
Signed this summer from Gremio as the replacement for Fernandinho. Strong competitor with good vision and individual skills.

FRED (Bra)
Age 21 (05.03.93)
Graduate of Atletico Mineiro's academy who made his name with Internacional in the 2012-13 season. Joined Shakhtar last year.

ILSINHO (Bra)
Age 27 (12.10.85)
Winger or right-back who enjoyed a previous spell with the club from 2007 to 2010. Returned in 2012 but has never reached the same level.

MARLOS (Bra)
Age 26 (07.06.88)
Small but physically strong midfielder who made his debut with Coritiba at the age of 18. Joined Shakhtar from Metalist in July.

Wellington NEM (Bra)
Age 22 (06.02.92)
A summer acquisition from Fluminense. An attacking midfielder, he was elected the best newcomer to the Brazilian championship in 2011.

Taras STEPANENKO
Age 25 (08.08.89)
Quality back-up in the role of holding midfielder. Very strong in the tackle – which means he receives quite a number of yellow and red cards.

TAISON (Bra)
Age 26 (13.01.88)
Moved to Metalist in 2010 from Internacional for €6m. Proved himself as a master of spectacular goals and joined Shakhtar in January 2013.

Alex TEIXEIRA (Bra)
Age 24 (06.01.90)
Playmaker who was singed from Vasco da Gama in 2010. Came to prominence in 2012-13 as Shakhtar won the domestic treble.

FORWARDS

Luiz ADRIANO (Bra)
Age 27 (12.04.87)
Prolific target man but has had disciplinary problems. Banned for one match by UEFA in 2012 for unsporting behaviour.

Serhiy BOLBAT
Age 21 (13.06.93)
A product of the Shakhtar academy. Returned to the first-team squad after an impressive loan spell at Metallurh Donetsk.

Oleksandr HLADKYI
Age 27 (24.08.87)
Graduate of the Metalist academy who returned to Shakhtar this summer after playing for the club for three seasons from 2007.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

SPORTING LISBON

Back at Europe's top table

THE STADIUM

Estadio Jose Alvalade
Capacity 50,095
Built for Euro 2004, it hosted the 2005 UEFA Cup Final – in which Sporting lost to CSKA Moscow.

THE COACH

Marco SILVA

Age 37 (12.07.77)
Calm and determined, he took over in May having made his name with modest Estoril, who he took into Europe twice.

TACTICS

Galvanised by a brash president, Bruno de Carvalho, things are on the up, with supporters flooding back to the club on the back of a recent upturn in fortunes. They will look to be competitive in the Champions League, but fighting for the domestic title and ensuring a place in next season's competition will be their top priority.

■ Silva produced beautifully balanced teams at Estoril that punched above their weight despite constantly losing key members – which is a feat he will attempt to replicate with Sporting in Europe.

■ Sticking with last year's highly successful 4-3-3 template, Sporting are likely to adopt a cautious approach upon their return to the continent's top table.

■ In the group stage for the first time since 2008, they will need to quickly bed in a raft of newcomers with the usual stream of talented academy graduates.

Back...Nani is at Sporting on a season-long loan

■ EUROPEAN CUP QUARTER-FINALISTS IN 1983

GROUP G Portugal

GOALKEEPERS

Marcelo BOECK (Bra)

Age 29 (28.11.84)
Has had limited chances as Patricio's understudy, but has not put a foot or hand wrong whenever he has been called upon.

Rui PATRICIO

Age 26 (15.02.88)
Strong wrists, excellent reactions, big and brave, he is first choice for club and country and is a reliable performer.

DEFENDERS

Andre GERALDES

Age 23 (02.05.91)
Solid right-back signed from Belenenses who has returned to Portugal this year after a spell in Turkish football with Istanbul BB.

JEFFERSON (Bra)

Age 26 (05.07.88)
Adventurous yet consistent left-back who loves to move forward and contribute to the attack. Joined the club from Estoril last year.

MAURICIO (Bra)

Age 25 (20.09.88)
Centre-back plucked from the Brazilian second tier who exceeded all expectations in his debut season with his fully committed and solid displays.

Paulo OLIVEIRA

Age 22 (08.01.92)
Promising central defender who will look to impose himself this season having made the step up from Vitoria Guimaraes.

Plus: Ricardo ESGAIO (Age 21, 16.05.93)

Ramy RABIA (Egy)

Age 21 (20.05.93)
Big, strong central defender who is good in the air and can also play in midfield. Won two African Champions League Finals with Al Ahly of Egypt.

Jonathan SILVA (Arg)

Age 20 (29.06.94)
Left-back signed from Argentinian side Estudiantes in August, he arrived with a big reputation and is seen as one for the future.

Cedric SOARES

Age 23 (31.08.91)
The right-back's outstanding crossing has been a major feature of the team's attack. He has vastly improved over the past two seasons.

MIDFIELDERS

ADRIEN Silva

Age 25 (15.03.89)
All-action, combative central midfielder who came of age last season. Possesses a fierce long-range shot and is a nerveless penalty taker.

William CARVALHO

Age 22 (07.04.92)
Coming off the back of a spectacular debut season, most of Europe's biggest clubs are chasing the defensive midfielder.

Ryan GAULD (Sco)

Age 18 (16.12.95)
Under-21 international who reached the Scottish Cup Final with Dundee United last year. Has a six-year deal with a €60m release clause.

Joao MARIO

Age 21 (19.01.93)
A product of the academy, he has returned from a season's loan at Vitoria Setubal. A smooth, fast thinker whose passing is very tidy.

Andre MARTINS

Age 24 (21.01.90)
The creative hub of Sporting, he has the talent to make a huge name for himself, with many believing he will be Portugal's future playmaker.

Oriol ROSELL (Spa)

Age 22 (07.07.92)
Came through Barcelona's La Masia youth system, so it should be no surprise that he is comfortable on the ball and likes to retain possession.

Simeon SLAVCHEV (Bul)

Age 20 (25.09.93)
Well-built and powerful despite his youth, he has good technique and an eye for goal. Already capped at senior level.

FORWARDS

Diego CAPEL (Spa)

Age 26 (16.02.88)
Wide player who tends to blow hot and cold. He is, though, a fans' favourite with his tireless running and committed approach.

Andre CARRILLO (Per)

Age 23 (14.06.91)
Winger who is capable of moments of sublime skill but also of disappearing acts. Explosive when on form; a passenger when not.

Carlos MANE

Age 20 (11.03.94)
Exciting winger who enjoyed a fine debut season. His pace, trickery and finishing ability make him a player of enormous potential.

Fredy MONTERO (Col)

Age 27 (26.07.87)
Clever, busy forward who could not stop scoring when he first joined Sporting. The goals, however, dried up dramatically last year.

NANI

Age 27 (17.11.86)
Right-footed winger who can play on either flank. Back on loan, seven years after leaving for Manchester United – who are still paying his wages.

SHIKABALA (Egy)

Age 28 (05.03.86)
A lively Egyptian winger, he has got some incredibly exciting tricks when in possession, but he is yet to show a consistent end product.

Islam SLIMANI (Alg)

Age 26 (18.06.88)
Big, powerful centre-forward who impressed at the World Cup and can prove a handful for any defence. He is a big threat in the air.

Junya TANAKA (Jap)

Age 27 (15.07.87)
Has that fortunate knack of seeming to always be in the right place at the right time, making him lethal in front of goal.

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

ZENIT

Villas-Boas bring more style to St Petersburg

THE STADIUM

Petrovsky Stadium
Capacity 21,405
Home games continue to be played at this limited arena until the new 69,000-seat Gazprom Arena is built.

THE COACH

Andre VILLAS-BOAS (Por)

Age 36 (17.10.77)
The former Porto, Chelsea and Tottenham boss replaced Luciano Spalletti in March 2014 after the Italian was sacked.

TACTICS

Owned by Russia's richest company, Gazprom, the 2008 UEFA Cup winners beat AEL Limassol and Standard Liege to secure their place in the group stage.

■ Unlike many other Russian sides, Zenit approach European rivals as equals and do not give up their attacking style, sticking to a 4-2-3-1 set-up with interchangeable strikers. Villas-Boas has tried to introduce a more attacking style.

■ With the departure of Roman Shirokov (now at Spartak) and the relative decline of Andrei Arshavin, Oleg Shatov has become the key creative figure in midfield, along with Portuguese playmaker Danny. Shatov joined from Anzhi last August and his technical ability is much valued by Villas-Boas.

■ In central midfield, Viktor Fayzulin now partners Axel Witsel. New signing Javi Garcia could also play a role, while Anatoliy Tymoschuk is an experienced option on the bench.

In reserve...Tymoschuk mostly appears from the bench

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE LAST 16 IN 2012 AND 2014

Yegor BABURIN

Age 21 (09.08.93)
Young reserve keeper who has only made a handful of appearances for Zenit but has appeared for Russia's under-21 side.

Yuri LODYGIN

Age 24 (26.05.90)
Signed last season to replace the injured Malafeev. Born in Russia, but moved to Greece aged 10 and won under-21 caps for Greece.

Vyacheslav MALAFEEV

Age 35 (04.03.79)
First choice for Russia at Euro 2012 but has since refused to play for the national team. Lost his wife in a car crash in 2011.

GOALKEEPERS

Alexander ANYUKOV

Age 31 (28.09.82)
Attacking right-back or wing-back who lost his place in the Russian national team and now has a rival at Zenit in Igor Smolnikov.

Domenico CRISCITO (Ita)

Age 27 (30.12.86)
Solid left-back, formerly a centre-back, who was surprisingly left out of Italy's 2014 World Cup squad. Moved to Zenit from Genoa in 2011.

Ezequiel GARAY (Arg)

Age 27 (10.10.86)
Joined Zenit after the World Cup where his was one of Argentina's mainstays in central defence. Impressive penalty and free-kick specialist.

DEFENDERS

Tomas HUBOCAN (Slk)

Age 28 (17.09.85)
Arrived at Zenit in 2008 and has improved a lot since. Can play at left-back or centre-half but is likely to be used mostly from the bench.

Nicolas LOMBAERTS (Blg)

Age 29 (20.03.85)
Fearless and reliable central defender who is good in the air. Has just returned from another bad injury. Nicknamed "The Mountain".

Luis NETO (Por)

Age 26 (26.05.88)
Tall centre-back who is good in the air, both defensively and in attack. Member of Portugal's 2014 World Cup squad but did not play.

Milan RODIC (Ser)

Age 23 (02.04.91)
Left-back who made his debut for the club against Liverpool in February 2013. Now back at Zenit after last season's loan to Volga Nizhni Novgorod.

Igor SMOLNIKOV

Age 26 (08.08.88)
Arrived from Krasnodar this summer and replaced Anyukov as first choice left-back. Broke into the Russia squad last year.

Andrei ARSHAVIN

Age 33 (29.05.81)
Russia's most notable player of the last decade. Returned to Zenit in July 2013 following a disappointing spell at Arsenal.

MIDFIELDERS

DANNY (Por)

Age 31 (07.08.83)
Attacking midfielder who is the team's playmaker. Was bought from Dinamo Moscow in 2008 for the then Russian record fee of €30m.

Viktor FAYZULIN

Age 28 (22.04.86)
One of four Zenit players in Russia's World Cup squad, he started at his home town club of Okean Nakhodka – a port that lies on the Sea of Japan.

Javi GARCIA (Spa)

Age 27 (08.02.87)
Holding midfielder signed for £12m from Manchester City, where he was never a regular starter during his two years in the Premier League.

Alexander RYAZANTSEV

Age 27 (05.09.86)
Attacking midfielder signed in January from Rubin Kazan, for whom he scored in their 2-1 Champion's League victory over Barcelona five years ago.

Oleg SHATOV

Age 24 (29.07.90)
Livewire attacking midfielder who scored an excellent goal to earn Zenit a 1-0 win at Standard Liege in the first leg of the final qualifying round.

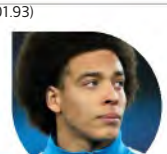
Ivan SOLOVYOV

Age 21 (29.03.93)
Former Dynamo Moscow prospect who is tipped for big things. Joined in 2013 but was then sent out on loan to Amkar Perm for the season.

Plus: Pavel MOGILEVETS (Age 21, 25.01.93)

Anatoliy TYMOSCHUK (Ukr)

Age 35 (30.03.79)
Experienced holding midfielder who is captain of Ukraine. He also led Zenit to UEFA Cup success in 2008 during his first spell with the club.



Axel WITSEL (Blg)

Age 25 (12.01.89)
A key figure in midfield who dictates the team's rhythm. Joined from Benfica in September 2012 and has hardly missed a game since.

Luka DJORDJEVIC (Mne)

Age 20 (09.07.94)
Back after spending last season on loan, he can also play on either wing. Scored on his international debut in 2012 against San Marino.

HULK (Bra)

Age 28 (25.07.86)
Possesses an impressive physique and a powerful shot, he has performed better in Russian league games than internationally of late.

Alexander KERZHAKOV

Age 31 (27.11.82)
Became Zenit's record scorer in all competitions at the start of this season with his 160th goal for the club. Can also drop deep to link the play.

Salomon RONDON (Ven)

Age 25 (16.09.89)
A good finisher who is also a threat in the air, he was signed from Rubin Kazan for €18m last season. Also had a spell with Malaga.

FORWARDS

(All ages as of 16.09.14)

GROUP C Russia

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6 of the best

Libertadores stars

Tim Vickery looks at the stars of this year's Libertadores Cup

1 Juan MERCIER

SAN LORENZO (Arg)

If San Lorenzo had a long wait for the Libertadores title, then the outstanding player of their campaign is an appropriate symbol of that conquest.

Now 34, Mercier took a long and winding road to the top, spending years in the lower leagues before making his top-flight debut with Argentinos Juniors at the age of 27. Now playing the best football of his career, he was a beacon of common sense in central midfield for the winners.

He consistently came up trumps at decisive moments, reading the game splendidly, identifying any danger for his defence and snuffing it out with well-timed interventions. While his midfield partner Nestor Ortigoza may have the better range of passing, Mercier's distribution was typically crisp and sound; an example being the ball out to the right that started the move leading to San Lorenzo's goal in the first leg of the Final.

There was even a moment of personal glory in the previous round. In the first leg of the semi-final, San Lorenzo managed two early goals against Bolivar. But there was no further breakthrough for over 40 minutes and, with the prospect of the return game at extreme altitude, the tie was still in the balance. But then Mercier snapped into a typically strong tackle on the halfway line and followed it up with a rare forward surge. He attempted to play in his striker, but after a tackle the ball fell back into his path. He swept the ball home – and within minutes a rattled Bolivar were 5-0 down and San Lorenzo were in the Final.

A couple of months earlier, Mercier may even have been looking at a place in Argentina's World Cup squad. Local media speculated that he might be a late inclusion. Although that didn't happen, the veteran didn't have to wait too much longer for his moment as San Lorenzo were crowned continental champions for the first time.

2 Marcos RIVEROS

NACIONAL (Par)

This year's competition was the first in which an accumulation of yellow cards led to suspension – a fact the runners-up had cause to regret when their midfield anchorman was forced to miss the first leg of the Final.

The best aspect of Nacional's game was the way they poured forward in number,s but it was clear in the home game against San Lorenzo that without Riveros holding the fort they were unable to do this with their customary efficiency. They also missed his fine striking at set-pieces and range of passing which linked the side together and brought the forward players into the game.

Riveros, however, now seems likely to have played his last game for Nacional, at least in this spell. Local rivals Olimpia are keen to snap him up on a five-year deal – a move which he will hope establishes him in the national side.

After a few friendly appearances as the team attempted to rebuild post South Africa 2010, the 26-year-old is now more mature. And with an excellent Libertadores campaign behind him, he is looking to make the leap from Nacional hero to national idol.

3 Romel QUINONEZ

BOLIVAR (Bol)

One of the competition's biggest shocks was the run of Bolivar to the last four – the first time a Bolivian team had made such progress. It was not least due to the performances of 22-year-old Romel Quinonez in goal.

Veteran Spanish coach Xabier Azkargorta was well aware of Quinonez's potential when he took charge in March. In his previous role as national coach he had called him up late in 2013 and given him a game in the last two rounds of World Cup qualification. After the cool authority he showed in 1-1 draws with Ecuador and Peru, it seemed clear Bolivia – not known for producing great keepers – could count on one of real promise.

That promise has been confirmed. A product of the Tahuichi Academy in Santa Cruz, Quinonez stepped into stadiums such as Rio's Maracana without fear, and his willingness to take responsibility helped spread confidence throughout the defence.

But he must beware an over-eagerness to come off his line – which could have contributed to the 5-0 loss to San Lorenzo as defenders froze in expectation that he could deal with everything.

4 Giorgian DE ARRASCAETA

DEFENSOR (Uru)

Eye catcher...De Arrascaeta (above, left) in action against Colombia's Atletico Nacional

No one in the Libertadores played more attractive football or scored more goals than Defensor, and in 20-year-old attacking midfielder De Arrascaeta they had a player with both brains and pace.

In 2013 he made fine progress with Uruguay's under-20s, going from a squad player at the start of the South American Championship to an outstanding contributor a few months later in the World Youth Cup.

The Libertadores was his breakthrough as a senior. He set up two goals in a resounding 4-1 win against Peru's Real Garcilaso before providing a stunning display in a 2-0 victory over Brazilian champions Cruzeiro.

Uruguay coach Oscar Tabarez did not heed calls for his inclusion in the World Cup squad but De Arrascaeta's time could be near with the team now in need of extensive rebuilding. A move abroad may also be on the cards and he has been bought by a group of investors headed by former international striker Daniel Fonseca.

5 Sherman CARDENAS

ATLETICO NACIONAL (Col)

The left-footed attacking midfielder was hailed as a star of the future when he took his first steps in the Colombian top flight with Bucaramanga at the age of 16. The next few years, though, were an exercise in frustration. A year spent at Millonarios was a disappointment, as were subsequent spells at nearby La Equidad and then with Atletico Junior.

But a move to Medellin has kick-started the 25-year-old's career, with Atletico Nacional coach Juan Carlos Osorio managing to get the best out of Cardenas, who played his part in three consecutive domestic titles and showcased his talents in this year's Libertadores.

Osorio likes to rotate his players and vary his formation, and Cardenas was used wide on the left in a 4-2-3-1 or occasionally in a central role. He can also drop into the first line of midfield or play up front in a 3-5-2. But wherever he played, his left foot caught the eye, both from set-pieces and shooting from range. His acceleration was also useful all over the field, along with his ability to orchestrate play from deep.

6 Ignacio PIATTI

SAN LORENZO (Arg)

No one had more right to be in the winning team photo at the end of the Libertadores than Ignacio Piatti. But he is not there. The most effective force in the team's attack was sold to Montreal Impact in the MLS – and despite pleas to FIFA to postpone the transfer deadline, he was unable to play in the second leg of the Final.

He was missed. Edgardo Bauza's team were not the same without Piatti's two-footed technical ability and his sound decision-making on the left of midfield. Dangerous cutting in onto his stronger right foot, but also able to beat the full-back on the outside, Piatti gave the team options. He kept the ball moving and was also the team's joint-top scorer in the competition.

All three of his goals came against Brazilian opposition and all were of huge significance. At home to Botafogo on the last night of the group phase, he scored twice in a 3-0 win that carried San Lorenzo to the knockout stage. And he hit the vital away goal in the second leg of the quarter-final against Cruzeiro.

In a nomadic and inconsistent career, Piatti has played his best football in the resurgence of San Lorenzo, helping them to domestic and continental titles. In his new northern adventure, Montreal trust he can make a similar impact.

Two or three for England?

Jonathan Wilson considers how an extra midfielder can give Roy Hodgson's side a better balance and make the most of his best players

Surrounded...but Wilshere, in action in the pre-World Cup friendly against Honduras, brought more stability to the England midfield

Anfield, January 18 this year. Brendan Rodgers, unusually, selected a 4-4-2, with Steven Gerrard and Jordan Henderson paired in the centre of midfield. Within 37 minutes, Liverpool were 2-0 down to Aston Villa, who had also hit a post. It was England's disaster of a World Cup foretold.

International tournaments are odd things, with too much being read habitually into too little. Freaks of chance, or individual moments of brilliance or misfortune, can have an extraordinary impact.

Managers such as Louis Van Gaal speak of the importance of the process as much as the result. And on that logic, a case could be made that England did rather better in the group stage of the 2014 World Cup than they had in the group stage of 1990, when they went on to reach the semi-final. Then, scratchy displays against the Republic of Ireland (1-1) and Egypt (1-0) were leavened by the promise of a goalless draw against Holland. This time, England were out after having marginally the better of 2-1 defeats by Italy and Uruguay.

You would normally say that perspective was needed, but so resigned has the English public become to the inadequacy of the national side that Roy Hodgson's position hasn't really been placed under scrutiny – which may be indicative of the growing maturity of the football audience or may be a sign of the growing apathy that surrounds the national game.

> Picking the right players in the most felicitous combination sounds simplistic but it is actually the hardest thing in football

Hodgson was ridiculed up to a point for his comment that "things happen in football", yet that, banal as it sounds, was the key to England's early exit: things happened.

Could Hodgson reasonably have expected Phil Jagielka to twice get caught under the ball? Could he have expected Gerrard to miss a simple header at a vital time? Could he have expected Wayne Rooney to head against the woodwork from two yards out? Could he have expected Leighton Baines, exposed as he was, to have looked so hapless when faced with a one-on-one battle with Antonio Candreva?

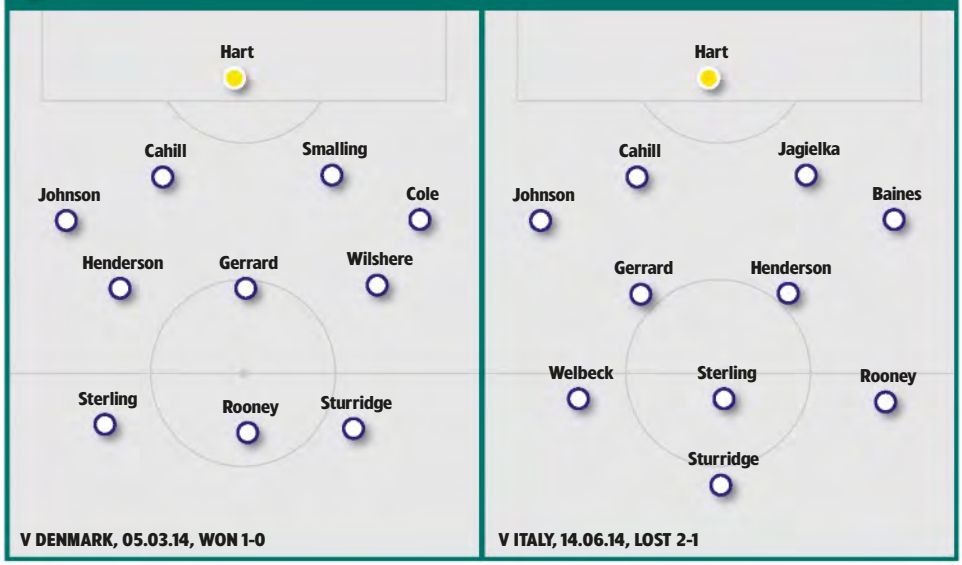
The mantra has gone up, as it always does, that Hodgson must "give the kids a chance", one of those phrases that means nothing and betrays the thinking that has proved so damaging to English football for so long. It's almost a self-defence mechanism: if we can kid ourselves that defeat and an early exit can somehow

have a long-term benefit, then the failure will not sting so much. But it's not about youth or experience; there's no magic formula. Winning tournaments, even progress in tournaments, is about getting the team right, and that means picking the right players in the most felicitous combination, whatever their age.

That sounds simplistic, but it's actually the hardest thing in football: it's not about picking the best XI and it's not about picking a formation, a style of play and fitting players into it. It's about compromise and balance, about ensuring that those playing in the roles they are selected for have the maximum multiplicatory effect on each other. England's problem for decades has been a failure to recognise that – even after they had beaten Spain, at a time when they were reigning world and European champions, in what turned out to be Fabio Capello's second-last game as manager. There were complaints about the style of the win, as though England could somehow have taken Spain on in open combat.

What's frustrating about the way England sidled out of the World Cup almost before it had started is that the warning signs had been there. Liverpool's first-half performance against Aston Villa in January was clear evidence that Gerrard and Henderson together at the back of midfield was not sufficient. Rodgers responded at the time by bringing on Lucas Leiva at half-time and, although he was soon injured, Liverpool came back to draw 2-2.

ENGLAND'S TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS: HOW HODGSON HAS TRIED BOTH 4-3-3 AND 4-2-3-1



Still problems to solve...Hodgson

Comfort zone... Henderson prefers to operate in a midfield three

That Hodgson had reservations about them as a pairing in a 4-2-3-1 was suggested by the friendly against Denmark in March when he opted for a 4-3-3, with Jack Wilshere alongside Gerrard and Henderson. Wilshere was subsequently injured, but the personnel is less important than the fact that, at that stage Hodgson was using an additional player deeper, which guarded against Gerrard's occasional habit of drifting away from his post protecting the two centre-backs.

The front three of Raheem Sterling, on the right, and Daniel Sturridge and Wayne Rooney alternating between playing centrally and in a narrow left-sided role, wasn't perhaps as fluent as might have been desirable, but there were occasional signs of understanding that, with more practice, may have developed further.

Rooney was poor in that game, as he was in England's first game at the World Cup when Hodgson had him play on the left with Sterling through the middle. Again his effectiveness was questionable, with his lack of defensive work a major issue. That prompted calls for him to be dropped, which itself drew a furious backlash. Again, what was odd was that the majority of debaters seemed to be talking in meta-terms: was Rooney irrevocably rubbish? Should a team always play its best player? Whereas the question should be: does the most effective England team on present form include Rooney?

This is a concern for Hodgson as he prepares for the Euros.

Rooney and Sturridge are two of England's best and highest-profile players. If neither can play wide, even though both have done it in the past, then Hodgson must either choose between them or play a 4-4-2 or 4-2-3-1. Do that, though, and he is reduced to playing a central pair in midfield. Henderson seems to prefer the liberty of a three and, with Gerrard retired, there's no obvious candidate to play the destructive role. James Milner, for all the mockery he has received, would be solid, while the best ball-winning English midfielder in the Premier League this year has probably been Lee Cattermole.

It would be a bold coach who risked the ridicule selecting the Sunderland man would entail from those who think only of the wild challenges that have brought a stream of red cards. It's a solution though, and Hodgson must find some way of shoring up the middle if he is to play Sturridge and Rooney centrally. WS

THE INSIDER

The expert view on events off the pitch

All eyes on Russia 2018

Preparations are under way despite political problems

State of the art...a computer-generated impression of the Spartak Moscow stadium and its surrounds for the 2018 World Cup

Vladimir Putin flew in to Rio de Janeiro for the World Cup Final and a few hours before kick-off, in the depths of the Maracana, the Russian president exchanged pleasantries with Brazil president Dilma Rousseff and FIFA's Sepp Blatter. He then posed for official pictures, with the handshake that represented the flight of the finals on its long journey east from Brazil.

So far, so good. Russia's hosting of the finals in 2018 had been so far under the radar as to be crawling along the ground. While nearly as much fuss and headlines had swarmed all over Qatar's 2022 baggage – heat, timing, workers' rights, voting scandal – as over Brazil's race against time, Russia 2018 had become almost forgotten.

Instead, the story of Russia and international sport that had been focused on over the previous year was not the World Cup, away in the distance, but last February's staging of the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi. In all the hullabaloo about the $50billion budget for Putin's "vanity project" on the Black Sea, it went unnoticed that the future of the main Fisht stadium in Sochi is predicated on football (including the World Cup) and not on winter sports.

> "It is a huge logistical effort. We know how difficult it is and that you have to suffer criticism"
> Sports minister Vitaly Mutko

Then Mario Gotze struck his late, late winning goal, the Maracana exploded in fireworks...and FIFA and world football packed their bags, leaving Brazil to a legacy of angst over the state of its own football.

But a World Cup hosting without controversy is impossible. Indeed, it is also a right of passage and affirmation of the enduring popularity of the sport.

Hence the timeline for Russia 2018 includes political as well as football milestones. Not only the date of "that" vote in Zurich in December 2010 but key dates in the Ukraine drama being played out by politicians, soldiers and arms salesmen.

While July 14, 2014, was the first day of the run-up to Russia 2018, later that same week came the shooting-down of Malaysia Airlines' flight MH17 with the loss of 298 lives over eastern Ukraine. No connection between politics and sport? Not for western politicians who reached for the easy headline option, demanding Russia be stripped of the World Cup.

FIFA, of course, rejected such calls, albeit in the sure knowledge that over the next four years preparations will be laced with concerns over Russia's internal and international politics.

Blatter and FIFA secretary-general Jerome Valcke will insist on no connection, although one specific issue does cross their notional boundaries. The Russian Football Union has incorporated into its own third division the three main clubs from Crimea, which Russia seized from Ukraine. The Ukraine federation's opposition placed Russia in breach of Article 84 of FIFA Statutes.

Doubtless this will come before FIFA's next executive committee on

Vitaly Mutko

Russia's sports minister is not the caricatured, stony-faced Russian or Soviet-era politician. He is at ease in the international milieu and not afraid to allow his sense of humour free rein in media briefings.

Born on December 8, 1958, in Krasnodar, Vitaly Leontievich Mutko followed Vladimir Putin on the political ladder from Saint Petersburg to Moscow. From president of Zenit, he stepped up to president of the Russian Football Union (RFU) then sports minister. Mutko was elected as a UEFA delegate to the FIFA ExCo in 2009 while chairing Russia's bid to win host rights to the 2018 World Cup.

In 2010 he had to give up his five-year presidency of the RFU under governance changes imposed by then-Russian president Dmitry Medvedev. Mutko was unhappy but may now appreciate he cannot be criticised, formally, of a conflict of interests. The disappointing showing of Russia's ice-hockey team at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver prompted a parliamentary inquiry which, among other issues, criticised Mutko for spending more than 10 times his official limit while in Canada.

However, his political talent is evident from his success in being maintained in his positions for so long by Putin.

World Cup timeline

2010

DEC 2: Russia awarded host rights by FIFA to the 2018 World Cup

2012

SEP 29: Announcement of the 11 host cities, with 12 stadia in six clusters

2014

FEB 7-23: Sochi hosts the Winter Olympic Games
FEB 21: President Victor Yanukovich flees Kiev
MAR 18: Russia formally annexes Crimea after a referendum
JUL 13: Brazil formally hands World Cup hosting duties to Russia
JUL 17: Malaysia Airlines flight shot down over eastern Ukraine
JUL 31: RFU executive approves three Crimea clubs in Russian league

2017

JUNE: Confederations Cup. Opening match and Final in Luzhniki (below), with matches also in Saint Petersburg, Kazan and Sochi

September 25 and 26, and which will be attended by Russia's sports minister, Vitaly Mutko, wearing his other hat as an ExCo member.

Assuming this hurdle is surmounted with some compromise, no one doubts that Russia will be ready for 2018; though as Sochi showed, hotel doors and furnishings may not be in place until virtually the kick-off.

Mutko, setting the preparatory framework, said: "We have guaranteed FIFA at least 12 stadia by 2017.

"We are opening the country for the World Cup. Every foreign visitor with a ticket to one of the matches will be welcome without a visa: a ticket and a passport is all that will be needed – the way Moscow was organised for the UEFA Champions League Final in 2008.

"We also decided, considering Russia is a well-developed country in terms of transport, that all ticket holders will be able to use the railways for free, showing just the match ticket."

But a perception Russia is already racing ahead with everything is off the mark. This is not intelligence gleaned from progress-chaser Valcke or Alexey Sorokin, head of Russia's 2018 organising committee, but from Mutko himself, while accompanying Putin in Rio.

Mutko was aware that "in Brazil, sometimes, there were things not done and that made FIFA nervous a few times". With less than four years to go, Russia must also accomplish a great deal in a short time.

He explained: "We plan to upgrade 11 airports and build one from scratch. We also need to upgrade the communications systems so there are no internet problems. In two cities we will build underground transport systems and we need to build 13 medical units as well as 64 modern hotels for the FIFA delegations, fans and teams, as well as the training camps.

"We are planning on constructing 64 base camps and 104 training pitches so that this World Cup leaves a legacy for all the country, not only the cities which host matches.

"One of the biggest challenges is the accommodation. Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Sochi and Kazan have the necessary infrastructure, but some cities need to do a lot more.

"As for the stadia, in September we will open the new Moscow Spartak stadium so that means we still need to build seven. By September we want to have made a start on all the projects. We are planning on them taking between 32 and 34 months which is a very tight deadline."

> While the stage is being prepared Russia must also work with their fan groups to address the spectre of racist behaviour

Too tight for FIFA's liking. In the autumn of 2012 Russia and FIFA announced the use of 12 stadia in 11 cities. In the wake of all the criticism of money wasting in Brazil, FIFA has pressed the Russians to cut out at least two cities.

That would reduce the challenges slightly, though for pride's sake the Russians would not admit it.

Mutko conceded, however: "It is a huge logistical effort. We are a large country but all the venues will be in the European part of Russia from Yekaterinburg in the east to Kaliningrad in the west.

"We know how difficult it is to organise such events and that you have to suffer criticism. In Sochi we opened ourselves up to every group – from journalists to fans to athletes – and they were all happy in the end and I think this is what counts."

While the stage is being prepared the Russians must also work with their fan groups to address the spectre of racist behaviour, while national coach Fabio Capello faces an equally daunting task in developing a national team which can be competitive.

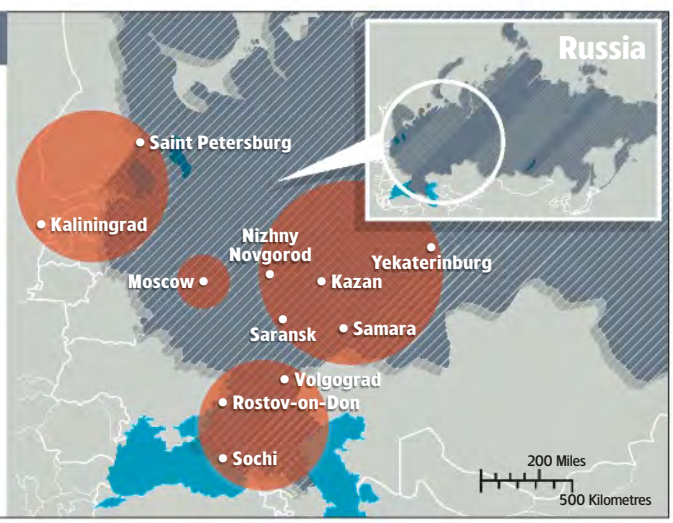
Mutko says: "Russia is a traditional football country and we have resolved to stage the event at the highest level possible."

And why not? As Mutko observed: "Mr Putin is actively involved." **WS**

THE CLUSTERS

FIFA president Sepp Blatter caused consternation among the Russian delegation in Rio de Janeiro when he suggested a reduction in the number of the venues – and followed up during discussions in August with Vitaly Mutko and Alexey Sorokin.

As it stands, World Cup 2018 stretches 1,200 miles from Saint Petersburg in the north to Sochi in the south and 1,500 miles from Kaliningrad in the west to Yekaterinburg in the east. This is roughly equivalent, in western European terms, with Helsinki to Rome and Paris to Moscow. No wonder FIFA is concerned.



Talentscout

Layvin KURZAWA

CLUB	Monaco
COUNTRY	France
POSITION	Left-back
AGE	21 (04.09.92)

One of four players nominated for the award of best youngster in Ligue 1 last season – along with former team-mate James Rodriguez, then-Toulouse defender Serge Aurier and eventual winner Marco Veratti of Paris Saint-Germain – Kurzawa is a reformed character who finally saw the light.

A little more than a year ago, the career of the Cote d'Azur-sourced France under-19 international was very much on the line. Confronted by a lack of professionalism, his nocturnal antics, dilettante lifestyle, little care for physical well-being and an all-round devil-take-the-hindmost attitude, Monaco coach Claudio Ranieri was not at all pleased and was apparently ready to swing the axe.

But advised by a little voice in his head that said this wild stallion could be tamed, Ranieri persevered. Following an abortive attempt to buy highly rated Lille left-back Lucas Digne – who instead joined PSG – he picked "Kurz" for the opening game of last term, at Bordeaux. And the youngster of Polish and Antillean stock went on to make a significant contribution to his team's 2-0 win with his non-stop activity, electrifying incursions into opposition territory and an assist for Emmanuel Riviere's opening goal.

After that, there was no chance of Ranieri dispensing with his services. In the space of just 90 minutes, Kurzawa had become undroppable, and for the rest of the campaign he would carry on his merry attacking way. Full of excitement and adventure when pushing forward, composed on the ball and – unsurprisingly for a gifted schoolboy striker – assured in dangerous attacking areas, he scored five goals in the French championship, which is a more than acceptable return for a full-back.

> "These days Layvin is only concentrating on football"
>
> Former Monaco coach Claudio Ranieri

A revelation in every sense of the word, he might even have made France's World Cup squad had his hopes not been scuppered by a persistent hamstring injury that he picked up in the spring.

Kurzawa feels the turning point was a realisation that so many of his former Monaco youth team-mates were making more career headway. "I was on holiday in Marrakech with Valentin Eysseric and Nampalys Mendy," he recalls. "They boosted my morale and encouraged me to succeed. To them, it was obvious I was going to make it at Monaco.

"I also owe a lot to my stepfather. He could have been a pro footballer himself, but lost his way slightly. He's never stopped telling me not to make the same mistakes as him."

Nick Bidwell

Gaston PEREIRO

CLUB	Nacional
COUNTRY	Uruguay
POSITION	Midfielder
AGE	19 (11.06.95)

While Uruguay's last-16 loss to Colombia in the World Cup saw the end of an era for a side that had been pretty much together since the 2007 Copa America, it was also a sign that the time had come for the next generation to stand tall.

One youngster well built for such a task is Pereiro, who at 6ft 3in could easily pass for a centre-back but is in fact an attacking midfielder of some skill and imagination.

Pereiro made a wonderful start to the domestic season in mid-August. For the opening fixture against Defensor he started wide on the left and finished on the opposite flank. He set up goals from both sides as Nacional powered to a sensational 5-2 win against the team who had arguably played the best football in this year's Libertadores Cup. But Pereiro may not have even started the game had veteran playmaker Alvaro Recoba been fit.

"When I made it to the first-team squad and I was training alongside him I couldn't believe it," says Pereiro, a Nacional fan who came through the youth ranks from the age of 13 and had Recoba as one of his idols. "It was like a dream and I could hardly speak to him.

"But now he gives me advice and encouragement. He's a phenomenon."

Pereiro made his first senior appearance, coming on as a substitute for the last half hour of a Libertadores qualifying tie away to Oriente Petrolero of Bolivia, at the end of January and looked instantly at home. "He thinks differently, passes well and scores goals," says Roberto Roo, co-ordinator of the club's youth work.

Nacional are now coached by former international midfielder Alvaro Gutierrez – who was promoted from the youth structure where he was in charge of Pereiro for two years, so the youngster has the benefit of a boss who knows and trusts him as he seeks to consolidate his senior career.

> "Within a few years he'll be really making a name for himself in Europe"
>
> Nacional veteran Alvaro Recoba on his young team-mate

At the start of next year Uruguay host the South American Under-20 Championship and Pereiro is likely to be their big hope. If he lives up to expectations, with Uruguay rebuilding, the time might even be right for a rapid promotion to the senior squad.

Tim Vickery

Quincy PROMES

CLUB	Spartak Moscow (Rus)
COUNTRY	Holland
POSITION	Winger
AGE	22 (04.01.92)
PREVIOUS CLUBS	Twente, Go Ahead Eagles (on loan)
INTERNATIONAL DEBUT	March 2014, v France
CAPS	1 (0 goals)

With only one season of senior football under his belt, only time will tell if the Amsterdam-born wide man made a judicious decision this summer when agreeing to swop Eredivisie club Twente for leading Russian side Spartak Moscow. But in today's globalised industry, the dash for cash invariably trumps everything. And after a fine season last term, topped by a first full cap, the momentum for a trade could not be slowed, with Spartak's offer of €15million (including add-ons) eventually sealing the deal.

Bankrolled by billionaire owner Leonid Fudin and the Lukoil company, Spartak's willingness to spend so heavily on Promes requires little by way of explanation. His sharp acceleration over short distances, instant changes of direction, trickery and directness make him a nightmare for full-backs – and as he showed when scoring a hat-trick against Scotland under-21s last spring, he is a master at cutting inside and going for goal.

A spell out east with Spartak, who have not won the Russian title since 2001, might not seem the easiest of sinecures. However, he is very much a fighter and has already bounced back from being rejected at the age of 16 after six seasons at Ajax's academy.

Thankfully for him, Twente rode to his rescue. Following excellent development work in their youth and reserve sides, plus a stint at second-tier Go Ahead Eagles, he is now setting off on an exciting new adventure.

Nick Bidwell

Mans SODERQVIST

CLUB	Kalmar
COUNTRY	Sweden
POSITION	Attacking midfielder
AGE	21 (08.02.93)

The Sweden under-21 international might not be able to quite match boyhood hero Thierry Henry for extreme pace, but he is still generating enough velocity to leave the majority of defenders floundering in his slipstream this season.

Catching the eye with his lively movement and ability to spring an offside trap, the 5ft 7in Soderqvist has proved a one-man goal-fest in the opening months of this year's Allsvenskan with his composed chance-taking and a fierce shot that requires very little backlift. And such form could well see him graduating to his country's senior side for the Euro 2016 qualifying campaign.

Sweden's national side is looking somewhat frayed at the edges these days and would undeniably benefit from some new blood. If coach Erik Hamren – who is already under fire for failing to guide the team to the World Cup in Brazil – has any sense he will be making a regular beeline for Kalmar's Guldfageln Arena. For in Soderqvist and midfielder Jonathan Ring, the *Roda Broder* (red brothers) have two of the best prospects in the country and the pair deserve a much wider audience.

As his club coach Hans Eklund will testify, one of the most important facets of the Soderqvist package is his versatility. While usually deployed as a right-sided attacking midfielder, he can fit in more or less anywhere in the final-third, either as a second striker, on the right wing or in left midfield.

Born and brought up in the town of Emmaboda in Kalmar County, the youngster is very much a local lad made good, graduating with honours from the Kalmar academy before breaking into the first team at the tail-end of the 2010 season. Gradually carving out a niche for himself, he made 11 league appearances in 2011, 17 in 2012, 22 last term and is now an automatic pick.

A big fan of Chelsea's Brazilian midfielder Willian – with whom he went head-to-head in a friendly against Shakhtar Donetsk a couple of years ago – Soderqvist would dearly love to join his hero in the Premier League one day. There's no doubt that the road to England starts here.

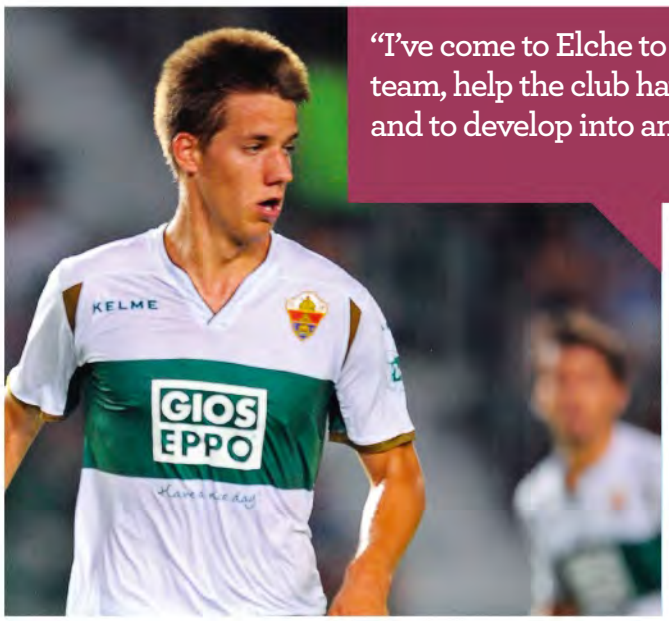
Nick Bidwell

Mario PASALIC

CLUB	Elche (Spa, on loan from Chelsea, Eng)
COUNTRY	Croatia
POSITION	Midfielder
AGE	19 (09.02.95)
PREVIOUS CLUB	Hajduk Split

A decade after Mario Stanic kicked his last ball at Stamford Bridge, Chelsea have once more drawn from the Croat well. They paid Hajduk Split £3million for midfield tyro Pasalic, who as soon as he had put pen to paper for the Premier League club was sent out on a season-long loan to La Liga's Elche.

Stanic, a bronze medallist with Croatia at the 1998 World Cup, spent four seasons with Chelsea, from 2000 to 2004, and made a total of 80 appearances for the pre-Roman Abramovich Blues. So what are the chances of the newcomer achieving similar longevity in south-west London? No one really knows.



"I've come to Elche to establish myself in the team, help the club have a successful season and to develop into an important player"

Mario Pasalic on his loan move

Cynics claim a teenager only a season into his professional career should not have been ripped from the Hajduk womb so soon. That Chelsea's habit of enlisting armies of hot prospects, farming them out on many and varied secondments, and then declaring them surplus to requirements is too risky a business for such a delicate work in progress.

The glass half-full brigade, however, sees the arrangement quite differently, arguing that the combination of Chelsea's faith in Pasalic and a couple of judiciously chosen loan spells in good quality European leagues will be the making of him.

"I'm very happy to play in the Spanish top flight with Elche," says the German-born but Dalmatian-raised youngster who was in Croatia's preliminary World Cup squad but just failed to make the final cut. "Jose Mourinho told me it would do me good to face teams of the quality of Real Madrid, Barcelona and Atletico Madrid. It's a great opportunity for me."

Elche director of sport Victor Orta certainly believes he has pulled off a coup. And on the evidence of Pasalic's displays for Hajduk last term it is impossible to disagree. A box-to-box midfielder of great industry, dynamism and goal threat – he scored 11 league goals last term, including a memorable brace in a 2-1 win over arch-rivals Dinamo Zagreb – Pasalic at times carried Hajduk single-handedly.

For someone so young and inexperienced, that speaks volumes about his class as a player, his maturity and strength of character.

Nick Bidwell

Maximilian ARNOLD

CLUB	Wolfsburg
COUNTRY	Germany
POSITION	Midfielder
AGE	20 (27.05.94)
INTERNATIONAL DEBUT	May 2014, v Poland
CAPS	1 (0 goals)

Equally comfortable in the role of central playmaker as he is in a free-flowing role out wide, the slightly-built Arnold's vision and sweet left foot were key ingredients as Wolfsburg sealed Europa League qualification last term.

The burning desire of the young man from the Saxon town of Riesa is there for all to see. After most training sessions, he makes a point of staying on for individual sessions and in interviews he often stresses the need to iron out his perceived weak points, such as heading and his defensive game.

"Wolfsburg were more welcoming towards me than Dortmund. I know I made the right decision" Maximilian Arnold

"My parents taught me to be ambitious," says a player who joined Wolfsburg from the Dynamo Dresden youth ranks in 2009 and was handed his Bundesliga debut two years later by Felix Magath. "My mother always used to say that you have to work to succeed. I really savour these additional efforts."

Although dedicated, grounded and applied, he could never be described as an automaton, though. On the pitch, flair, instinct and no fear are his stock in trade, and he clearly knows his own mind too, even prepared, when choosing his first Bundesliga employer, to select Wolfsburg over Borussia Dortmund, the club he once supported.

"During trials in Dortmund I found it a little rigid and alien," he says. "In Wolfsburg it was different, very family orientated. Here everyone knows who you are, from the cooks to the teachers."

His progress has caught the eye of national coach Joachim Low, who handed him his first full cap as a second-half substitute in a friendly with Poland in the summer.

Nick Bidwell

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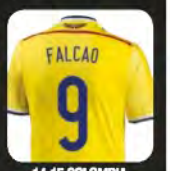

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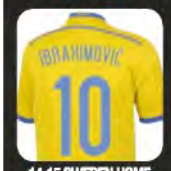

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World Service

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Ahead...Real Sociedad's Xabi Prieto gets in front of Aberdeen midfielder Willo Flood in their Europa League qualifying clash

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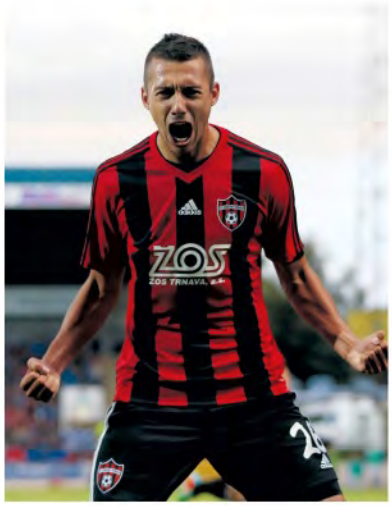

Goalscorer...Spartak Trnava's Ivan Schranz

World Service

Clash...India defender Joyner Lourenco (in blue)

PAKISTAN

Neighbours meet

Pakistan and India played each other for the first time in nine years, with their under-23 sides meeting twice in three days.

India won 1-0 with Robin Singh scoring the only goal before being sent off. Pakistan then won 2-0 with goals from Kaleem Ullah and Saddam Hussain.

All sporting ties were suspended after the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack, with little contact since, other than a one-day cricket series in 2012.

PERU

Ascues' fine start

Central defender Carlos Ascues, who is on loan at Universidad San Martin from Greek side Panetolikos, scored twice on his international debut as Peru beat Panama 3-0.

RWANDA

Nations Cup ban

Rwanda were disqualified from the African Nations Cup qualifiers for fielding an ineligible player against Congo. It was discovered that Daddy Birori, who played in the first leg of July's game, is in fact Tady Agiti Etekiama, a naturalised Rwandan striker who plays for AS Vita Club.

13 players from Brazil's 23-man World Cup party dropped from the first squad named by Dunga

Internationals

2015 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS

3rd round

1st legs

July 19 - Gaborone
Botswana 2 (Tshireletso 30, 37)
Guinea-Bissau 0
HT: 2-0

July 19 - Freetown
Sierra Leone 2 (Jabbie 55, U Bangura pen 72)
Seychelles 0
HT: 0-0
● *Sierra Leone progressed to group stage on the strength of this result after Seychelles withdrew from 2nd leg*

July 19 - Kampala
Uganda 2 (Majwega 49, Massa 69)
Mauritania 0
HT: 0-0
● *Mauritania had lost to Equatorial Guinea in the 2nd round but progressed after Equatorial Guinea were banned for fielding an ineligible player*

July 20 - Cotonou
Benin 1 (Sessegnon 18)
Malawi 0
HT: 1-0

July 20 - Pointe-Noire
Congo 2 (Gandze 70, Dore 82)
Rwanda 0
HT: 0-0

July 20 - Maseru
Lesotho 1 (Seturumane 60)
Kenya 0
HT: 0-0

July 20 - Dar es Salaam
Tanzania 2 (Mcha 65, pen 71)
Mozambique 2 (Domingues pen 47, Carvalho 87)
HT: 0-0

2nd legs

Aug 2 - Bissau
Guinea-Bissau 1 (Seidi 16)
Botswana 1 (Ramatlhakwane 79)
HT: 1-0
Botswana 3-1 on agg

Aug 2 - Blantyre
Malawi 1 (Banda 13)
Benin 0
HT: 1-0
Agg 1-1; Malawi 4-3 on pens

Aug 2 - Kigali
Rwanda 2 (Ndahinduka 52, Kagere 60)
Congo 0
HT: 0-0
Agg 2-2; Rwanda 4-3 on pens
● *However, Rwanda were subsequently found to have fielded an ineligible player in the 1st leg and were expelled from the competition, with Congo taking their place in the group stage*

Aug 3 - Nairobi
Kenya 0
Lesotho 0
Lesotho 1-0 on agg

Aug 3 - Nouakchott
Mauritania 0
Uganda 1 (Ssentongo 90+2)
HT: 0-0
Uganda 3-0 on agg
Sent off: Traore (Mauritania) 79min

Aug 3 - Maputo
Mozambique 2 (Josemar 45+1, Domingues 83)
Tanzania 1 (Samatta 77)
HT: 1-0
Mozambique 4-3 on agg

Winners entered group stage

Group stage draw

Group A
Congo
Nigeria
South Africa
Sudan

Group B
Algeria
Ethiopia
Malawi
Mali

Group C
Angola
Burkina Faso
Gabon
Lesotho

Group D
Cameroon
DR Congo
Ivory Coast
Sierra Leone

Group E
Ghana
Guinea
Togo
Uganda

Group F
Cape Verde Islands
Mozambique
Niger
Zambia

Group G
Botswana
Egypt
Senegal
Tunisia

Matchdays: *Sep 5/6, Sep 10, Oct 10/11, Oct 15, Nov 14/15, Nov 19*

The top 2 in each group and the 3rd-placed team with the best record will qualify for the finals; hosts Morocco qualify automatically

FRIENDLIES

Sunday, August 3
Aug 3 - Luanda
Angola 1 (Freddy 16)
Ethiopia 0
HT: 1-0

Wednesday, August 6
Aug 6 - Lima
Peru 3 (Ascues 44, 90, Ramos 81)
Panama 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 6,000. **Ref:** Espinel (Ecu)
Peru: Gallese - Advincula, Riojas, Ramos, Yotun (Trauco 46), Ballon (Ubierna 85), Ascues, Cruzado (Velarde 65), Cedron (Carlos Gonzales 53), Christofer Gonzales (Hinostroza 77), Chavez.
Panama: McFarlane - Milville (Hawkins 46), Dixon, Cummings, Avila, Jeanine (Narbon 46), Nunez (Chiari 80), De Gracia (Peralta 46), Camargo (Villanueva 70), Barcenas (Arroyo 66), Stephens.

Friday, August 8
Aug 8 - Dushanbe
Tajikistan 4 (D Ergashev 16, Vasiev 36, Fatkhulloev 52, Davronov 53)
Malaysia 1 (Yahyah pen 45)
HT: 2-1

Tuesday, August 12
Aug 12 - Almaty
Kazakhstan 2 (Islamkhan 38, Konysbayev 63)
Tajikistan 1 (Tohirov 58)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 7,500

Wednesday, August 13
Aug 13 - Luanda
Angola 0
Botswana 0

Thursday, August 14
Aug 14 - Antigua
Guatemala 3 (Contreras 26, Miranda 73, 80)
Nicaragua 0
HT: 1-0

Saturday, August 16
Aug 16 - Road Town
British Virgin Islands 2 (Robinson, Fisher)
Saint-Martin 4 (Samer x2, Louis, Cocks)

Wednesday, August 20
Aug 20 - Baku
Azerbaijan 0
Uzbekistan 0
Att: 4,500. **Ref:** Vadachkoria (Geo)
Azerbaijan: S Agayev - Ramaldanov, Shukurov (Qirtimov 60), Abisov, Budak (Nouri 46; Allahverdiyev 90+3), Amirguliyev, Javadov (Ozkara 46), Nazarov, Erat (Ismayilov 59), Aliyev (Huseynov 73), Dadashov.
Uzbekistan: Suyunov - Krimets (Yuldashov 53), Tukhtakhodjaev, Mustafoev, Khashimov, Rashidov, Musaev (Juraev 72), Iskanderov (Sayfiev 68), Kozak (Akhmedov 78), Olimov (Sergeev 53), Nagaev (Nurmatov 45+1).

Aug 20 - Panama City
Panama 4 (Pinzon 67, 74, De Gracia 71, Diaz 89)
Cuba 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 8,000. **Ref:** Register (Jam)
Panama: McFarlane - Hawkins, Peralta, Patrick, Avila (Davis 46), A Henriquez, Narbon (De Gracia 60), Murillo (Arroyo 60), Barcenas (Diaz 46), Nunez (Rodriguez 67), Polo (Pinzon 46).
Cuba: D Guerra - Rosabal, Lopez, Malblanche, Corrales, Marquez, Rodriguez (F Guerra 54), A Martinez, Cruz (Perez 55), Gomez (Suarez 81), Puga (Alfonso 68).

Saturday, August 23
Aug 23 - Antigua
Guatemala 1 (Ruiz 61)
Cuba 0
HT: 0-0

2015 ASIAN CUP FINALS

In Australia

Match schedule

Group A

Jan 9	Australia v Kuwait (Melbourne)
Jan 10	South Korea v Oman (Canberra)
Jan 13	Kuwait v South Korea (Canberra)
	Oman v Australia (Sydney)
Jan 17	Australia v South Korea (Brisbane)
	Oman v Kuwait (Newcastle)

Group B

Jan 10	Uzbekistan v North Korea (Sydney)
	Saudi Arabia v China (Brisbane)
Jan 14	North Korea v Saudi Arabia (Melbourne)
	China v Uzbekistan (Brisbane)
Jan 18	Uzbekistan v Saudi Arabia (Melbourne)
	China v North Korea (Canberra)

Group C

Jan 11	UAE v Qatar (Canberra)
	Iran v Bahrain (Melbourne)
Jan 15	Bahrain v UAE (Canberra)
	Qatar v Iran (Sydney)
Jan 19	Iran v UAE (Brisbane)
	Qatar v Bahrain (Sydney)

Group D

Jan 12	Japan v Palestine (Newcastle)
	Jordan v Iraq (Brisbane)
Jan 16	Palestine v Jordan (Melbourne)
	Iraq v Japan (Brisbane)
Jan 20	Japan v Jordan (Melbourne)
	Iraq v Palestine (Canberra)

Top 2 in each group qualify for quarter-finals

Quarter-finals

Jan 22	Gp A 1st v Gp B 2nd (Melbourne) (QF1)
	Gp B 1st v Gp A 2nd (Brisbane) (QF2)
Jan 23	Gp C 1st v Gp D 2nd (Canberra) (QF3)
	Gp D 1st v Gp C 2nd (Sydney) (QF4)

Semi-finals

Jan 26	QF1 winners v QF3 winners (Sydney)
Jan 27	QF2 winners v QF4 winners (Newcastle)

3rd-place match

Jan 30	(Newcastle)

Final

Jan 31	(Sydney)

2015 COPA AMERICA

To be played in Chile from June 11 to July 4

Entrants
Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Jamaica (guests), Mexico (guests), Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela

Draw to be held on Oct 27, 2014 in Vina del Mar. The 12 countries will be drawn into 3 groups of 4 teams; the top 2 in each group and the 2 3rd-placed teams with the best record will qualify for the quarter-finals

2014-15

EUROPA LEAGUE

Your essential guide to the groups

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94 Borussia M'gladbach
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Group B
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104 Torino

Group C
94 Asteras Tripoli
94 Besiktas
100 Partizan Belgrade
104 Tottenham Hotspur

Group D
94 Astra Giurgiu
94 Celtic
96 Dinamo Zagreb
102 Salzburg

Group E
96 Dynamo Moscow
96 Estoril
100 Panathinaikos
100 PSV

Group F
96 Dnipro
98 Internazionale
100 Qarabag
102 Saint-Etienne

Group G
98 Feyenoord
102 Rijeka
102 Sevilla
102 Standard Liege

Group H
96 Everton
98 Krasnodar
98 Lille
104 Wolfsburg

Group I
100 Napoli
102 Slovan Bratislava
102 Sparta Prague
104 Young Boys

Group J
94 AaB
96 Dynamo Kiev
102 Rio Ave
104 Steaua Bucharest

Group K
96 Dinamo Minsk
98 Fiorentina
98 Guingamp
100 PAOK

Group L
98 Legia Warsaw
100 Lokeren
100 Metalist Kharkiv
104 Trabzonspor

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OVERVIEW | COACH

AAB

DENMARK — GROUP J

After winning the domestic double for the first time last season, defending either trophy would represent considerable success this term. The compact **Nordjyske Arena** holds 16,000 but that is reduced to around 10,000 for European fixtures.

Kent Nielsen, who was one of the heroes of Denmark's Euro 92 triumph, has taken his no-nonsense playing style as a central defender into management.

APOLLON

CYPRUS — GROUP A

Although they are based in the southern coastal city of Limassol, they play their European games at the 22,800-capacity **GSP Stadium** in Nicosia. They are in the Europa League group stage for a second successive year.

Christakis Christoforou took over at Apollon in March 2013 after a spell in charge of the club's women's side. The 50-year-old previously coached Cyprus under-17s.

ASTERAS TRIPOLI

GREECE — GROUP C

With only six years in the top flight behind them, they finished fifth last season and also reached the Greek Cup Final. Their 7,493-capacity **Theodoros Kolokotronis Stadium** is named after a Greek War of Independence hero.

At 38, **Steikos Vergetis** is one of the youngest coaches in Greece, having begun his career with Asteras in 2006. Was once a translator.

ASTRA GIURGIU

ROMANIA — GROUP D

Although not well supported, billionaire owner Ioan Niculae still attracts important players by paying big wages. They will play their Europa League games 40 miles from Giurgiu, at the 50,000-capacity **National Arena** in Bucharest.

Resigned after just a month in charge but was then later re-installed, **Daniel Isaila** is a respected coach who builds strong, organised teams.

BESIKTAS

TURKEY — GROUP C

The Black Eagles are the reigning Turkish champions and this season they are playing their home games at the 76,000-capacity **Ataturk Olympic** stadium while their own ground in central Istanbul undergoes renovation.

Former Croatia defender **Slaven Bilic** took charge last season after a spell at Lokomotiv Moscow. He had previously spent six years as Croatia's national coach.

BORUSSIA MONCHENGLADBACH

GERMANY — GROUP A

Twice winners of the UEFA Cup (in 1975 and 1979) and European Cup finalists in 1977, coach Lucien Favre has said he fears the Europa League could handicap his side's Bundesliga form. Home is the 46,249-capacity **Borussia-Park**.

Lucien Favre likes to work on raising individual and collective standards, and can be tetchy and unforgiving when tactical plans are not respected.

CELTIC

SCOTLAND — GROUP D

Scottish champions for the past three seasons, with little in the way of big competition now that Rangers, Hearts and Hibernian are all in the second tier. European nights at **Celtic Park** (capacity 60,355) still remain special occasions.

Ronny Deila led Stromsgodset to the Norwegian title last year – their first for 43 years – before taking over from Neil Lennon as boss of Celtic in June.

CLUB BRUGGE

BELGIUM — GROUP B

The club may have had a great European record in the 70s and 80s but those days are long since gone. Their recent record is poor and the supporters who pack the 29,472-capacity **Jan Breydel Stadium** deserve much better.

In his first full season, Michel Preud'homme will want to put his stamp on the team, but he must sort out the disastrous transfer policy of recent years.

LEAGUE WINS | CUP WINS

HOW THEY QUALIFIED	TACTICS	KEY PLAYERS
After beating Dinamo Zagreb, the Danish champions dropped out of the Champions League and into the Europa League following a surprise 5-1 aggregate thrashing by APOEL of Cyprus.	Although they play a standard 4-4-2 in most games, they are adaptable when the need arises. Against better opposition in Europe Nielsen could opt to play with just one striker and fill the midfield area.	■ On loan midfielder **Thomas Enevoldsen** was in Holland and Belgium for five years. ■ Striker **Nicklas Helenius** (left) struggled last season at Aston Villa, but was prolific in previous seasons with AaB. ■ **Thomas Augustinussen** is an inspirational and influential presence in his role as a defensive midfielder.
After finishing third in the Cypriot league last season, Apollon were drawn against Lokomotiv Moscow in the last qualifying round. After a 1-1 draw in the first leg, they pulled off a stunning 4-1 win in Moscow.	In a 4-2-3-1 set-up, Rachid Hamdani and Marcos Gullon screen the defence, providing a base for Gaston Sangoy and Camel Meriem to supply Jan Rezek, who gets the nod over Abraham Gneki Guie and Fabrice Olinga.	■ Argentinian number 10 **Gaston Sangoy** (left) is a talismanic figure whose goals have been crucial to the team's progress. ■ Club captain and centre-back. 30-year-old **Giorgos Merkis** has spent his entire career with the club. ■ Franco-Algerian **Camel Meriem** is an experienced midfield schemer.
In the Europa League for a third successive season, they went through to the group stage for the first time after overcoming RoPS of Finland, Mainz of Germany and Israel's Maccabi Tel Aviv.	Vergetis used a 4-2-3-1 system to great effect against Mainz, although he has now lost the services of Pablo De Blasis, who joined the German club after scoring in the second leg of their qualifying game.	■ **Martin Rolle** is a 29-year-old Argentinian attacking midfielder on loan from San Lorenzo. ■ Spanish club captain **Fernando Usero** (left) is a fine passer in midfield. ■ After an excellent season in his native Argentina with Independiente last term, centre-forward **Facundo Para** will hope to continue finding the net in Europe.
After last season's first-ever silverware, they now make their debut in the Europa League group phase, having beaten Slovan Liberec of the Czech Republic and then shocked Lyon of France on away goals.	Defensive midfielders Vincent Laban and Seidu Yahaya need to hold the line behind a creative front four as the central defenders are not the quickest and can leave keeper Silviu Lung exposed.	■ Nigerian striker **Kehinde Fatai** is back at the club after spending last season on loan at Club Brugge. ■ Playmaker **Constantin Budescu** is a contender for the national team but needs to concentrate on his defensive work. ■ A goalkeeper like his namesake father, **Silviu Lung** (left) is agile, with great reflexes.
Besiktas faced Feyenoord in the Champions League third qualifying round. After beating the Dutch, they lost to Arsenal, with a late goal from Alexis Sanchez sending them down into the Europa League.	Bilic varies his formation between a 4-2-3-1 with a lone striker, Demba Ba, and a more conventional 4-4-2, where Ba is supported by Mustafa Pektemek. Olcay Sahan has also been pushed forward into a 4-3-3.	■ Striker **Demba Ba** (left), who is keen to put a disappointing spell at Chelsea behind him, scored a hat-trick against Feyenoord. ■ Argentina international midfielder **Jose Sosa** is an exciting new signing who spent last season on loan at Atletico Madrid. ■ German-born midfielder **Olcay Sahan** is the team's main schemer.
Sixth place in the Bundesliga saw entry into the final qualifying round of the Europa League, where they struggled to win 3-2 against Sarajevo in Bosnia before winning 7-0 in the return leg.	Favre likes to maintain that his side can play in all manner of different ways, but in truth they are much, much stronger when hitting teams on the break. His sides are invariably well organised.	■ **Andre Hahn** (left) has returned from Augsburg and offers incisiveness, urgency and a constant threat from the right flank. ■ Defensive midfielder **Christoph Kramer** was a member of the World Cup squad. ■ Swiss international **Yann Sommer** replaced Marc-Andre Ter Stegen in goal when he left for Barcelona this summer.
A second chance in the Champions League, after a loss to Legia Warsaw was overturned because the Polish side fielded an ineligible player, was spurned as they lost 2-1 on aggregate to Maribor.	Celtic are a club that traditionally plays attacking football, so Deila will have to find a way of maintaining the flair that their supporters love without leaving the team open to the counter-attack.	■ English-born Scotland international **Kris Commons** (left) offers an attacking threat from midfield, despite a lack of mobility. ■ Captain of club and country, **Scott Brown** is a combative, driving force in midfield. ■ Once British football's most expensive goalkeeper, **Craig Gordon** hopes to have put severe injury problems behind him.
After home-and-away victories over Brondby of Denmark, the side that finished third in Belgium last term secured their place in the group stage with two wins over Swiss side Grasshoppers.	Preud'homme takes great pride in his standing as a winner. Therefore, with his reputation at stake in European competition, he will put the emphasis on winning rather than entertaining the public.	■ Now 37, club captain **Timmy Simons** is retiring at the end of the season and would love to end on a high note. ■ Goalkeeper **Matthew Ryan** had a great first season in Belgium last term. ■ Defender **Oscar Duarte** (left) was one of the surprise stars of the World Cup and scored in Costa Rica's victory over Uruguay.

OVERVIEW | COACH

COPENHAGEN

DENMARK — GROUP B

Denmark's biggest and wealthiest club are aiming to bounce back from a terrible season last time out with 10 new faces. The club's **Telia Parken** stadium, with its 38,000 capacity, has hosted past European club Finals.

Stale Solbakken returned last after difficult spells at Cologne and Wolverhampton Wanderers, where his enigmatic character did not suit the players.

DINAMO MINSK

BELARUS — GROUP K

Once a dominant force in Belarus football, they now lag behind BATE and were runners-up last season. They will play Europa League matches at the **Borisov Arena**, which was opened this year and has a capacity of 13,126.

Uladzimir Zhuravel played for the club during their golden years in the 90s and won six league titles. He returned to the club this year.

DINAMO ZAGREB

CROATIA — GROUP D

Stadion Maksimir (capacity 35,123) has housed the Croatian champions for the last nine seasons, but all is not harmonious off the pitch, with the club's most loyal fans, the Bad Blue Boys, at odds with club president Zdravko Mamic.

The brother of the club's executive president, **Zoran Mamic** also acts as sporting director. Not the most spectacular of coaches or the most experienced.

DNIPRO

UKRAINE — GROUP F

Runners-up in the Ukraine Premier League last season, the club from the industrial city of Dnipropetrovsk will play their Europa League matches at the 70,000-capacity **NSC Olimpiyskiy** in Kiev for security reasons.

Former boss of Ukraine's national side, **Myron Markevych** took charge of the club after Spanish coach Juande Ramos left at the end of last season.

DYNAMO KIEV

UKRAINE — GROUP J

Well equipped with a good mix of foreign internationals and young local talent, they won their first trophy since 2011 with this year's Ukrainian Cup triumph. Will share the **NSC Olimpiyskiy** (70,000) with Dnipro.

Former Dynamo star of the 90s **Serhiy Rebrov** replaced another club legend, Oleh Blokhin, in April and won the Ukrainian Cup shortly afterwards.

DYNAMO MOSCOW

RUSSIA — GROUP E

The first Russian club to reach the UEFA Cup final, in 1972, they have not won the national title since 1976. While their home in the centre of Moscow is being rebuilt, they are sharing the suburban **Khimki Arena** (capacity 18,636) with CSKA.

Former Spartak Moscow and Russia keeper, **Stanislav Cherchesov** is a strong disciplinarian. Joined the club from Amkar Perm in April.

ESTORIL

PORTUGAL — GROUP E

The **Estadio Antonio Coimbra da Mota** – with its capacity of just over 5,000 seats – will host European football for a second consecutive season. Meagre resources, plus the loss of their coach and key players, could see them struggle.

The vastly experienced **Jose Couceiro** has a tough act to follow after Estoril's three years of unprecedented success under Marco Silva.

EVERTON

ENGLAND — GROUP H

They may have competed in the English top flight for a record 110 seasons, but the club hasn't won a trophy since they lifted the FA Cup in 1995. Home since 1892, **Goodison Park** currently has a capacity of 39,572.

Roberto Martinez, who is one of the most highly rated up-and-coming bosses, missed the Europa League last term after leaving FA Cup winners Wigan for Everton.

LEAGUE WINS | CUP WINS

HOW THEY QUALIFIED	TACTICS	KEY PLAYERS
After last season's second place in the Superliga, they beat Dnipro in the opening Champions League qualifier before losing 4-0 away to Bayer Leverkusen and going out 7-2 on aggregate to the German side.	They have generally relied on a strong defence and counter-attacks in past European campaigns, but new signing Steve De Ridder in attack gives Solbakken the option of 4-4-2 this season if desired.	■ Irish-American captain **Thomas Delaney** is a tough, clever central midfielder who recently broke into Denmark's national side. ■ Goalkeeper **Stephan Andersen** is back in Danish football after spells abroad at Charlton, Evian, Real Betis and Go Ahead Eagles. ■ **Nicolai Jorgensen** (left) is a skilful player on the left flank sho scores spectacular goals.
They progressed to the group stage of the Europa League for the first time after beating Nacional of Portugal 5-2 on aggregate. Had earlier seen off MYPA of Finland and Romania's CFR Cluj.	Five clean sheets in qualifying are testament to the ability of keeper Alyaksandr Hutar and defender Syarhey Palitsevich. Nemanja Nikolic provides the creativity in midfield.	■ **Chigozie Udoji** (left), a 28-year-old Nigerian with a Bulgarian passport, scored four goals on the way to the group stage. ■ Goalkeeper **Alyaksandr Hutar** made his name with BATE and was Belarusian player of the year in 2011. ■ Defender **Syarhey Palitsevich** is very disciplined and reliable.
After beating Zalgiris Vilnius of Lithuania, Dinamo were knocked out of the Champions League by Denmark's AaB. They then beat Petrolul Ploiesti of Romania in the Europa League qualifiers.	Dinamo are set up to attack in domestic games and often find the Croatian league too easy. This lack of a defensive challenge is then exposed in Europe, where the team often find themselves on the back foot.	■ Top scorer in the Croatian league last season with 22 goals, **Duje Cop** has a nose for a goal and must always be watched. ■ Algerian striker **El Arbi Hillel Soudani** (left) can score goals as well as create them. ■ Midfield organiser **Paulo Machado** became the club's most expensive player ever when signed from Olympiakos for €5m in June.
After losing 2-0 away to Copenhagen after a 0-0 draw in the Champions League qualifiers, they made sure of a place in the Europa League with a 2-1 aggregate win over Croatian side Hajduk Split.	With their fair share of big, powerful players, it's no surprise that the current side rely more on physical strength than invention in attack. At the same time, it helps Markevych to build a reliable defence.	■ Skilful midfielder **Yevhen Konoplyanka** (left) has remained loyal despite some serious interest from several Premier League clubs. ■ Croatian defender **Ivan Strinic** has proved a worthy investment since joining from Hajduk Split in 2011. ■ International forward **Roman Zozulya** is quick and fearless.
The Ukrainian Cup winners, who also finished fourth in the league, qualified directly for the group stage. They have high hopes and progress to the knockout phase is the minimum requirement.	Rebrov prefers to set up in a 4-5-1 formation, with one striker up front on his own. Serhiy Rybalka and Younes Belhanda provide the energy in central midfield, with Jeremain Lens and Andriy Yarmolenko out wide.	■ At 39, goalkeeper and captain **Oleksandr Shovkovskiy** is vastly experienced. ■ A Morocco international with a French passport, **Younes Belhanda** is the engine of the midfield. ■ **Andriy Yarmolenko** (left) plays on either wing and is the biggest talent to come out of the club's academy since Andriy Shevchenko.
They were held at home in both qualifying games, against Israel's Ironi Kiryat Shmona and Omonia of Cyprus, having to rely on away victories by a single goal to secure a place in the group phase.	Being spoilt for choice when it comes to attack-minded players makes it hard for Cherchesov to find a starting place for all of his best players. His problems are at the other end of the pitch, in defence.	■ Reliable holding midfielder **Igor Denisov** who joined from a disintegrating Anzhi in 2013 after 12 years with Zenit. ■ **Aleksandr Kokorin** has the technique and attacking skill that is rare in Russia. ■ French international **Mathieu Valbuena** (left) was signed from Marseille in August and is the team's playmaker.
Last season's fourth place in the Primeira Liga meant direct qualification for the group stage. Despite a creditable showing on their European debut last season, they still finished bottom of their group.	Everything points towards Couceiro adopting an ultra cautious approach as the club redefines its objectives. "The goals this season are to stay up and to win at least one match in the Europa League," he says.	■ Former Braga and Porto utility defender **Emidio Rafael**'s experience will be vital to a young team. ■ **Seba** (left) is a fast, direct and powerful Brazilian with an eye for goal. ■ Free-scoring **Toze** is on loan from Porto, after scoring 21 goals for their reserves in Portugal's second tier last time out.
The club finished fifth in last season's Premier League and qualified directly for the group stage, meaning that they are playing in the Europa League for first time since 2009.	Martinez always likes his teams to play expansive football, but a lack of depth to his squad could prove problematic the further they go in the tournament. He may concentrate on the Premier League.	■ A club-record £28million was paid to secure the permanent transfer of Belgian striker **Romelu Lukaku** (left), after last season's loan. ■ A three-times Champions League winner, **Samuel Eto'o** offers great experience. ■ At 20, midfielder **Ross Barkley** is a bright talent, although his start to the current campaign was hampered by injury.

OVERVIEW | COACH

FEYENOORD

HOLLAND — GROUP G

The departures of Bruno Martins Indi, Stefan De Vrij, Daryl Janmaat and Graziano Pelle covered the club's debts but may mean a season without silverware for the fans at the **Stadion Feijenoord** (capacity 51,177), known as "De Kuip".

Dutch coach of the year in 2008, **Fred Rutten** was capped once by Holland as a player and he succeeded Ronald Koeman when he left for Southampton.

FIORENTINA

ITALY — GROUP K

After narrowly missing out on the Champions League for the last two seasons, and going out of the Europa League last year to Juventus, they will be keen to make their mark this time. Home is the 47,290-capacity **Stadio Artemio Franchi**.

An accomplished striker and a Serie A winner with Roma in 2001 during his playing career, **Vincenzo Montella** is now making a name for himself as a coach.

GUINGAMP

FRANCE — GROUP K

A small club in Brittany, whose 18,256-capacity **Stade du Roudourou** can hold more than double the town's population. Only made it into Ligue 1 last year, and were in the third tier as recently as 2010, so this is a huge adventure for the club.

Jocelyn Gourvennec took over in 2010 and has masterminded the club's rise by producing hard-working sides that never know when they're beaten.

HJK

FINLAND — GROUP B

The dominant side in domestic Finnish football, having won a fifth consecutive league title last year. Former international midfielder Aki Riihilahti is now the club's CEO. Their 10,770-capacity **Sonera Stadium** was opened in 2000.

Mika Lehkosuo, who captained HJK when they qualified for the 1998 Champions League group stages, replaced Sixten Bostrom earlier this year.

INTERNAZIONALE

ITALY — GROUP F

Much is expected in this first full season of the Erick Thohir era as the Indonesian tycoon/owner begins to make his presence felt, on and off the pitch. Milito, Cambiasso, Samuel and Zanetti are all absent this season from **San Siro** (80,018 capacity).

The decision this summer to stand by **Walter Mazzari** makes total sense and may guarantee a successful transition period for the club during a difficult period.

KRASNODAR

RUSSIA — GROUP H

Owned by local oligarch Sergey Galitsky, the club finished above the more established Kuban last season in a best-ever fifth spot. With a new arena under construction they share the 35,000 **Kuban Stadium** with their arch-rivals.

Aleh Konanaw of Belarus joined the club in the summer of 2013. His expertise will boost his players' confidence in games against bigger opponents.

LILLE

FRANCE — GROUP H

While lagging miles behind Paris Saint-Germain and Monaco in terms of financial clout, they are a well-run club, with a shrewd coach in Girard and a fine new home in the 50,157-capacity **Stade Pierre-Mauroy**.

Rene Girard made his name as a player with Bordeaux and as a coach with Montpellier, where he won the French league against all odds in 2012.

LEGIA WARSAW

POLAND — GROUP L

The introduction of Bartosz Bereszynski as an 86th-minute substitute in the second leg against Celtic put paid to any hopes of playing Champions League group games this season at the **Pepsi Arena** (capacity 31,103).

Norwegian **Henning Berg** surprisingly replaced Jan Urban in December and six months later his side were crowned Polish champions.

LEAGUE WINS | CUP WINS

HOW THEY QUALIFIED	TACTICS	KEY PLAYERS
Lost home and away to Besiktas in the Champions League qualifying campaign and only just made it to the Europa League group phase, beating Zorya Luhansk of Ukraine with an injury-time goal.	Rutten prefers to play a 4-3-3 system, with Clasie controlling the midfield and allowing Immers to commute between midfield and attack. If they have got a problem, however, it is a suspect defence.	■ With his low centre of gravity and precise passing, 5ft 7in **Jordy Clasie** bosses midfield. ■ Hard-working midfielder **Lex Immers** (left) covers a lot of ground and creates opportunities for both himself and others. ■ English-born Turkey international **Colin Kazim-Richards** is on loan from Bursaspor to replace Graziano Pelle, now at Southampton.
Fourth in Serie A, they qualified automatically for the group stage due to the fact that Italian Cup winners Napoli finished third in the league and went into the Champions League qualifiers.	Under Montella, Fiorentina have consistently played excellent, attacking football. Much will depend on the fitness of strikers, German Mario Gomez and Giuseppe Rossi, who missed much of last season through injury.	■ Colombia's **Juan Cuadrado** (left) is a dynamic presence on the wing. ■ Former Villarreal midfielder **Borja Valero** is a real battler who is never slow to get stuck in when the chips are down. ■ Argentinian newcomer **Jose Maria Basanta**, who has arrived from Monterrey, can play at either left-back or in central defence.
Surpassed all expectations by finishing outside of last season's Ligue 1 relegation zone and winning the French Cup – beating local rivals Rennes 2-0 in the Final – to qualify directly for the group stage.	The back line is protected by two defensive midfielders and they rely on Christophe Mandanne and Mustapha Yatabare for goals. Don't expect too much change in Europe, as they don't have much strength in depth.	■ Attacking midfielder **Sylvain Marveaux** is back in France on loan from Newcastle United, looking to make up for lost time. ■ Franco-Malian striker **Mustapha Yatabare** has a record of a goal almost every two games since joining Guingamp from Boulogne in 2011. ■ Veteran Danish right-back **Lars Jacobsen** (left) arrived this summer from Copenhagen.
In the Champions League qualifiers they overcame Macedonia's Rabotnicki before losing to APOEL and dropping into the Europa League, where they beat Rapid Vienna to reach the group stage.	A 4-4-2 at home becomes a more cautious 4-2-3-1 when playing away. They rely on several veterans, including midfielder Markus Heikkinen, who has now dropped back to defence, and Teemu Tainio.	■ Former Auxerre and Tottenham Hotspur midfielder **Teemu Tainio** is back home after a spell with New York Red Bulls. ■ Attacking livewire **Demba Savage** (left) can cause problems from either out wide or through the middle. ■ Ghana midfielder **Anthony Annan** was a deadline-day signing from Schalke.
Qualification was all very straightforward for *I Nerazzurri*, who won 3-0 away to Stjarnan – the third-best team in Iceland last year – and then thrashed them 6-0 in the return game.	Newcomers Nemanja Vidic in defence and Gary Medel in midfield, along with Handanovic in goal, Hernanes in midfield and Rodrigo Palacio in attack should form the backbone of Mazzari's team.	■ With so many experienced players gone, playmaker **Hernanes** has a vital role both as a reference point and as the man to set it all up. ■ Goalkeeper **Samir Handanovic** has been their best player of the last two seasons. ■ Everyone needs a consistent scorer to win things and Inter are no exception. Argentinian striker **Mauro Icardi** (left) could be the man.
Scored 17 goals in their first two European ties, beating Estonia's Sillamae Kalev and Diosgyor of Hungary, before stunning Spanish side Real Sociedad 3-1 on aggregate to grab a league spot.	They boast probably the best youth football academy in Russia and with their Brazilian imports, the team is at its best when attacking – as they demonstrated early in the season with a 4-0 win against Spartak.	■ Brazilian attacking midfielder **Joaozinho** (left) is only 5ft 4in, but he possesses a great shot and provides the creative spark. ■ Brazilian striker **Ari**, once of Spartak Moscow, is a good finisher. ■ After two penalty saves within four minutes against Rostov early in the season, **Andrey Sinitsyn** is now first-choice goalkeeper.
Third place in Ligue 1 saw entry to the qualifiers for the Champions League, but after beating Grasshoppers of Switzerland they lost home and away against Porto and dropped into the Europa League.	Girard will favour a 4-3-3 system this season, with Origi leading the line. But it's defensively where they are at their strongest, with a settled back four offering good protection to Nigerian keeper Enyeama.	■ Many believe that tough central defender **Simon Kjaer** (left) should be playing at a much higher level. ■ Goalkeeper **Vincent Enyeama** kept 11 clean sheets on the trot in Ligue 1 last season. ■ **Divock Origi** is back on loan after joining Liverpool for £10m after starring at the World Cup for Belgium.
Beat St Patrick's Athletic and then Celtic in the Champions League but were expelled for fielding an ineligible player. A 3-0 aggregate victory over Aktobe provided some small consolation.	The basic set-up is 4-2-3-1 but Berg has also tried out 4-4-1-1 as well. Miroslav Radovic, Ondrej Duda and Michal Kucharczyk work well together in midfield, while Michal Zyro is a creative outlet on the wing.	■ Slovakia international **Dusan Kuciak** was the best goalkeeper in Poland last season. ■ At 19, **Ondrej Duda** (left), the Slovak has quickly become key in a creative midfield role. ■ Serbian **Miroslav Radovic** is a versatile midfielder or striker who has been with the club since 2006 and was named the best player in the Ekstraklasa last season.

OVERVIEW | COACH

LOKEREN

BELGIUM — GROUP L

Belgian Cup winners and fifth in the league last season, the club's annual budget of €7.5m means that there are unlikely to be too many great European nights any time soon at their 9,500-capacity **Daknamstadion**.

0 / 2

A strict disciplinarian, **Peter Maes** has been mentioned as a possible Anderlecht coach and looks set to move to a bigger club in the future.

METALIST KHARKIV

UKRAINE — GROUP L

Unable to play in Kharkiv for security reasons, they will play their the Europa League games at the **NSC Olimpiyskiy** (capacity 70,000) in the west of the country, in the capital Kiev – as will Dnipro and Dynamo Kiev.

0 / 0

Ihor Rakhayev was appointed as acting coach in February, after the resignation of Miron Markevich, and was handed the role on a permanent basis in May.

NAPOLI

ITALY — GROUP I

For four seasons, Napoli have been consistently in the top three of Italian football but with only two Italian Cups to show for their efforts. As always, the **Stadio San Paolo**, with its 60,240 capacity, could be a very important 12th man.

2 / 5

The immensely experienced **Rafa Benitez**, in his second season at Napoli, knows that he has to deliver on the home front or in Europe if he is to remain at his post.

PANATHINAIKOS

GREECE — GROUP E

The club have had to play second fiddle to bitter rivals Olympiakos in recent years and supporters at the 16,003-capacity **Apostolos Nikolaidis Stadium** in Athens will be hoping that Anastasiou can change that soon.

20 / 18

Giannis Anastasiou led the side to the Greek Cup title after taking over last year. His task now is to challenge the dominance of rivals Olympiakos.

PAOK

GREECE — GROUP K

From the northern city of Thessaloniki, they were Greek Cup runners-up and finished second in the Super League but lost in the post-season play-off. Their **Toumba Stadium** (capacity 28,703) has some of the country's most vocal fans.

2 / 4

Angelos Anastasiadis became coach of the club for a third time in May. Was in charge of the Cypriot national team from 2004 until 2011.

PARTIZAN BELGRADE

SERBIA — GROUP C

The club's dire financial situation was not helped by a second-place finish to Belgrade rivals Red Star in last season's Serbian league. They continue to struggle to fill their home ground, the 32,000-capacity **Partizan Stadium**.

25 / 12

At 35, **Marko Nikolic** is one of the youngest coaches in the Serbian top flight. He took over in December 2013 after spells with Rad and Vojvodina.

PSV

HOLLAND — GROUP E

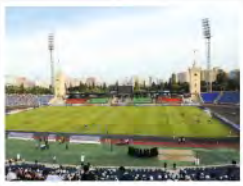
The Eindhoven club have not won the Dutch title since 2008 and Cocu, who is still a relative novice as a head coach, will hope that his side can have a good run in Europe to raise morale at the **Philips Stadion** (capacity 35,000).

21 / 9

Now recovered from the removal of a tumour from his back, **Phillip Cocu** assisted Bert Van Marwijk as Holland were runners-up at the 2010 World Cup.

QARABAG

AZERBAIJAN — GROUP F



Semi-professional until the break-up of the former Soviet Union, they won their first league title in 1993 and play home games at the **Tofig Bahramov Stadium** (capacity 32,000), named after the 1966 World Cup linesman.

2 / 3

Gurban Gurbanov has been the club's head coach since 2008, and has led them to success in the 2009 Azerbaijan Cup and the league last season.

LEAGUE WINS / CUP WINS

HOW THEY QUALIFIED	TACTICS	KEY PLAYERS
Through to the group stage of the competition for the first time after beating Hull City on away goals. After winning 1-0 at home, they went down 2-1 in England, but Jordan Remacle's away goal proved crucial.	The team's form has been extremely mixed so far this season and how well they do in Europe will depend on their ability to keep their best players fit. Just reaching the group stage has been a massive achievement.	After just one season of top-flight football, **Hans Vanaken** is one of the most sought-after midfielders in the league. Goalkeeper **Davino Verhulst** was signed from Sint Truiden. Danish centre-back **Alexander Scholz** (left) has become a key player since joining the club 18 months ago.
After 180 goalless minutes against Ruch Chorzow of Poland in the last qualifying round, they made it into the league phase of the competition with an extra-time winner from Cleiton Xavier.	Having lost a host of his best players during the summer, it may take time for Rakhayev to get a settled side. He will need to quickly find the right balance and make do with what he has, at least until the winter transfer window.	Brazilian **Cleiton Xavier** is the team's captain and inspiration in midfield. Argentinian defender **Cristian Villagra** can perform equally well on the left or right flank and has two international caps. **Edmar** (left) is a long-serving Brazilian midfielder who has been naturalised in Ukraine and played for the national side.
Last year's Italian Cup winners entered the Champions League after finishing third in Serie A, but were knocked out at the last qualifying stage by Athletic Bilbao, who won 4-2 on aggregate.	Benitez will go with a tried-and-tested 4-2-3-1 line-up that sees Higuain playing as the front man. Jose Callejon, Hamsik and Dries Mertens will provide the support, with Lorenzo Insigne having a case to be included.	**Gonzalo Higuain**'s 17 Serie A goals in his first season was no mean feat. Expect more. More than 300 games for Napoli testify to the importance of **Marek Hamsik** (left), although injury disrupted last season. Competitive Swiss midfielder **Gokhan Inler** is the man to whom Benitez looks when the going gets tough.
European Cup runners-up back in 1971, they beat Midtjylland in the this season's Champions League before losing 2-1 at home to Standard Liege and dropping into the Europa League.	Panathinaikos use the Dutch model of 4-3-3 that was picked up by Anastasiou during his time there. He will look to his players to attack from the wings and the whole side to press their opponents have the ball.	Swedish striker **Marcus Berg** (left) was the leading scorer in the Super League with 15 goals in 30 matches last season. At 33, Croatian international **Mladen Petric** has plenty of experience. **Ouasim Bouy** is a 21-year-old Dutch midfielder on loan from Juventus who has great potential.
After a 1-0 loss to Zimbru Chisinau in Moldova, they put things right in Greece, going into the group phase with goals from Facundo Pereyra, Stefanos Athanasiadis (left), Robert Mak and Maarten Martens.	Anastasiadis prefers a 3-4-3 system of play and makes use of a number of set plays from free-kicks which the team work on to perfection in training. Speed and quick passing is his mantra to his players.	Veteran captain **Dimitris Salpingidis** (left), 33, has been with the club since 2010. **Giorgos Tzavellas** is the man who keeps things tight at the back, although he does have a disciplinary problem which can lead to red and yellow cards. Attacking midfielder **Maarten Martens** was signed in January from Dutch side AZ.
Took Red Star's place in the Champions League after the champions failed to comply with Financial Fairplay regulations. But defeat on away goals to Ludogorets saw them drop into the Europa League.	They play 4-4-2 at home, switching to 4-2-3-1 on their travels with Nikola Drinic and Danko Lazovic dropping deeper and Petar Skuletic as the lone forward. Andrija Zivkovic is a threat on the right.	Montenegrin international **Nikola Pantic** is a key figure in midfield. Striker **Danko Lazovic** (left) is back at the club after spells in Holland and Russia. Teenage midfielder **Andrija Zivkovic** is the latest great hope to come through the ranks. He became Serbia's youngest-ever international last year, aged 17.
Beat Austrian second division side St Polten 4-2 on aggregate, and then secured a group place with victory over Shakhtyor Salihorsk, winning 1-0 at home and 2-0 in Belarus.	Cocu likes to play attacking football and will opt for a 4-3-3 system with Stijn Schaars controlling midfield, Memphis Depay bursting forward and Luuk de Jong looking to get among the goals.	Midfielder **Stijn Schaars** may not be spectacular but he seldom makes mistakes. Left-winger **Memphis Depay** (left) has blistering pace and has the ability to score goals from nowhere. **Luuk De Jong** will be anxious to show that there is life after Newcastle United and Borussia Monchengladbach.
Beat Valletta in the Champions League before going out to Salzburg, they then sprang a major surprise by holding Twente 0-0 at home and then drawing 1-1 in Holland to go through on away goals.	The squad is comprised of seven different nationalities, with key roles belonging to Bosnian goalkeeper Ibrahim Sehic, Albanian defenders Admir Teli and Ansi Agolli, and Brazilian forward Reynaldo.	Holding midfielder **Namig Yusifov** has played a record 30 matches in the European club competitions for the club. Defender **Ansi Agolli** (left) is a current Albania international who has played in Switzerland and Ukraine. Brazilian forward **Reynaldo** was with Anderlecht at 18 but failed to make it.

OVERVIEW | COACH

RIJEKA

CROATIA — GROUP G

Billionaire Italian oil magnate Gabriele Volpi has made the club a real threat to Dinamo Zagreb over the past two years. The **Stadion Kantrida** (capacity 10,261) will be knocked down in December and replaced a by a new arena.

Former Slovenia national coach **Matjaz Kek** took over in February 2013 and led the team to second place in the league in his first full season in charge.

RIO AVE

PORTUGAL — GROUP J

European football was staged at the 12,000-capacity **Estadio do Rio Ave** this season for the first time as the club from northern Portugal made its continental debut as domestic cup runners-up to double winners Benfica last season.

Pedro Martins is a highly competent coach who guided Maritimo to the Europa League group stage in 2012-13 and they were unfortunate not to progress.

SAINT-ETIENNE

FRANCE — GROUP F

They may be some way off competing with PSG, but Galtier has done an excellent job without spending much money. Their **Stade Geoffrey-Guichard** (41,965) is known as *Le Chaudron* (the cauldron) because of the fans' passion.

Christophe Galtier spent 10 years working as a number two, including a spell at Portsmouth, before taking charge of Saint-Etienne at the end of 2009.

SALZBURG

AUSTRIA — GROUP D

Austrian football's dominant team since Red Bull took over in 2005, but the 31,895-capacity **Red Bull Arena** is still yet to host group-stage Champions League football. Breakaway club Austria Salzburg are in the third tier.

Adi Hutter led Grodig, previously a village team, into the top flight for the first time in their history and then to a second-place finish on their Bundesliga debut last term.

SEVILLA

SPAIN — GROUP G

The Europa League returned to the **Estadio Ramon Sanchez-Pizjuan** (capacity 45,500) for the third time in eight years in May. Coach Unai Emery also led the side to fifth place in La Liga, albeit 27 points behind the champions, Atletico Madrid.

Unai Emery is an obsessive tactician who is supremely hard working. Had three successive third-placed finishes with Valencia and took over at Sevilla last year.

SLOVAN BRATISLAVA

SLOVAKIA — GROUP I

The only Slovak club to have won a European title, lifting the Cup-winners Cup in 1969, they play at Inter Bratislava's former home, the **Stadion Pasienky** (11,500 capacity). A yet-to-be-built new home of their own remains mired in bureaucracy.

Ex-international **Frantisek Straka** took over in the close season, replacing Dusan Galis, who now divides his time between football and politics.

SPARTA PRAGUE

CZECH REPUBLIC — GROUP I

The country's wealthiest, best supported and most successful team went four years without a trophy prior to last season. Reconstructed in the 1990s, their home, the 19,416-capacity Generali Arena (known as "Letna") is showing its age.

Now in his third – and most-successful spell – as Sparta coach **Vitezslav Lavicka** completed an unprecedented league, cup and Super Cup treble in July.

STANDARD LIEGE

BELGIUM — GROUP G

Standard gave Europe a low priority last season but are likely to treat it more seriously this time out. The club has the most fervent support in Belgium and no team will relish visiting **Stade Maurice-Dufrasne** with over 30,000 fans inside.

Guy Luzon has gained popularity with fans following an excellent second place in the league last season and his obvious commitment to the cause.

LEAGUE WINS | CUP WINS

HOW THEY QUALIFIED	TACTICS	KEY PLAYERS
Impressive stuff as they won all six qualifying matches to reach the group stage, beating Hungary's Ferencvaros, Vikingur of the Faroe Islands and Moldovan champions Sheriff Tiraspol.	Kek usually sets his side up in a 4-2-3-1 formation, in which their defence is very strong. Although disciplined they do play attacking football and they made a great start to their domestic league competition.	■ Former under-21 international **Andrej Kramaric** is currently Croatian football's most potent attacking threat. ■ A right-sided player, **Ivan Tomecak** (left) is quick and is a good passer of the ball. ■ Team captain **Anas Sharbini** plays on the left side of midfield and is an attacking player with the ability to decide games
After beating Gothenburg, the Portuguese Cup winners sealed their place with a dramatic 92nd-minute winner against another Swedish side, Elfsborg, to reach the group stage on away goals.	Rio Ave are a well balanced side, with coach Martins tending to favour a counter-attacking approach. Seen very much as minnows at this level, they may adopt a cautious approach but could provide a shock or two.	■ Towering Brazilian centre-back **Marcelo** leads the back line superbly. ■ Skipper **Tarantini** is a free-scoring inspiration from midfield. ■ Although he made just a handful of appearances for Porto, former under-21 international winger **Ukra** (left) will cause problems for defences down either flank.
Big players in Europe in the 1970s, *Les Verts* finished fourth in Ligue 1 last season but they needed a penalty shoot-out to overcome Karabukspor of Turkey to take their place in the group stage.	Although they usually line up in a classic 4-3-3 formation, the arrival of new strikers Kevin Monnet-Paquet and Ricky Van Wolfswinkel gives Galtier the option of switching to 4-4-2.	■ A French striker of Turkish origin, **Mevlut Erding** (left) has been a consistent goalscorer for a number of French clubs. ■ **Jeremy Clement** is a defensive midfielder who has battled back from a double fracture of the tibia that threatened his career in 2013. ■ A local boy, **Loic Perrin** who's the club's much revered captain of his only club.
After beating Qarabag of Azerbaijan, Champions League football was once again denied to the Austrians as they lost 4-2 to Malmo – despite winning the opening leg against the Swedes.	Hutter's Salzburg side are fine exponents of the pressing game and try to hem opponents into their own half, forcing the opposition into mistakes and then catching them unawares.	■ **Kevin Kampl** is the creative heart of the team, usually playing on the right or in the centre of midfield. ■ Spaniard **Jonathan Soriano** (left) may be little known in his own country but he is one of European football's most lethal strikers. ■ Together with Soriano, Brazilian striker **Alan** made up a 57-goal strikeforce last season.
Victory in last season's Europa League meant an automatic place in this season's competition. However, this year's winners will be given a place in next year's Champions League.	With a dozen or so players heading through the doors in both directions, plus the loss of the influential Ivan Rakitic, it will take time for Sevilla to find their style, but it does look like they will be more direct this year.	■ The hero of last year's success, **Beto** is a good goalkeeper, even if he can be erratic. ■ Fast, strong and clever striker, **Carlos Bacca** (left) was a bus conductor and a fishmonger before he finally made it as a footballer. ■ Striker **Gerard Deulofeu**, who was a Euro Under-19 champion with Spain in 2011 and 2012, is on loan from Barcelona.
Domestic champions in three of the past four seasons, they beat The New Saints of Wales and Moldova's Sheriff before losing to BATE of Belarus and dropping down into the Europa League.	A solid 4-2-3-1 at home, with Marko Milinkovic and Igor Zofcak on the flanks, is more when away, with extra cover for the defensive midfield two. Veteran striker Robert Vittek is an impact sub these days.	■ Left-sided Serb striker **Marko Milinkovic** can also play in midfield and scored a brace against The New Saints in the Champions League qualifiers. ■ Skipper **Igor Zofcak** (left) has a calming influence on his side from midfield. ■ Much-travelled goalkeeper **Dusan Pernis** was inspired against Sheriff in Moldova.
Thrashed Levadia Tallinn 8-1 on aggregate in the Champions League before losing on away goals to Malmo. They then beat PEC Zwolle to qualify for the Europa League group stage.	Lavicka's attack-oriented 4-5-1 offers a range of options going forward but his team's defensive frailty was exposed when, minus Mario Holek, they blew a two-goal lead against Malmo in the Champions League.	■ **Josef Husbauer** was top scorer in the Czech league last season, despite playing in central midfield. ■ While not totally convincing at international level, **David Lafata** (left) is prolific for his club. ■ Converted from defensive midfielder to central defender by Lavicka, **Mario Holek** has flourished in the role.
After coming from behind to beat Panathinaikos in Greece, any hopes of further progress in the Champions League were ended with defeats both at home and in Saint Petersburg to Zenit.	It's almost as difficult to forecast what Standard's approach will be to games in Europe as it is to say what owner Roland Duchatelet will do next. The European campaign could be fun while it lasts.	■ After criticism from fans, **Eiji Kawashima** (left) is now acknowledged as one of the top keepers in the Belgian league. ■ Club captain **Jelle Van Damme** is a leader on and off the pitch. ■ When he finds some consistency, **Paul-Jose M'poku** is Standard's best player; he's fast, clever and he knows where the goal is.

OVERVIEW | COACH

STEAUA BUCHAREST

ROMANIA — GROUP J

With owner Gigi Becali in jail, Champions League football is needed to maintain financial stability, so the domestic title – and therefore the chance to play the continental elite at the **Arena National** (55,000) – will be the top priority.

Former Steaua and Romania midfielder **Constantin Galca** had never managed at the top level before replacing Laurentiu Reghecampf in May.

TORINO

ITALY — GROUP B

Back in European football after a 20-year gap, everything that happens from here on is a bonus after the club took Parma's place. Home games in Turin are played at the **Stadio Olimpico**, which has a capacity of 28,140.

Nothing if not experienced, **Giampiero Ventura** has been in charge of 18 different clubs, including Sampdoria, Bari, Napoli, Cagliari and Udinese.

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR

ENGLAND — GROUP C

Winners of the UEFA Cup twice and the Cup-winners Cup once, **White Hart Lane** (capacity 36,284) has seen some great European nights in the past, but what the supporters want in the future is Champions League football, not the Europa League.

Mauricio Pochettino did well in the Premier League at Southampton last term and now hopes to take his new club into England's top four this term.

TRABZONSPOR

TURKEY — GROUP L

The club from the coastal city of Trabzon have not managed to break the domestic dominance of the Istanbul clubs, but they have consistently qualified for European competition over the past decade. **Huyseyin Avni Aker** stadium holds 24,000.

Fresh from his success with Algeria at the World Cup, **Vahid Halilhodzic** agreed a two-year deal to coach the club for a second time.

VILLARREAL

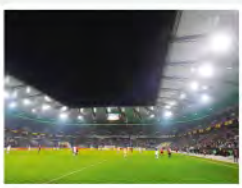
SPAIN — GROUP A

The club nicknamed the Yellow Submarine have consistently punched above their weight in Spain and Europe, despite being based in a town with just 50,000 inhabitants – a figure that is only double the capacity of their **El Madrigal** stadium.

These days **Marcelino** is seen as one of the brightest coaches in La Liga although he previously had mixed results with Zaragoza, Racing and Sevilla.

WOLFSBURG

GERMANY — GROUP H



Volkswagen's very own club were in the German third tier in the early 1990s and only gained access to the top-flight in 1997. And while the Lower Saxons' 26,000-capacity **Volkswagen Arena** is not exactly a cauldron of emotion, it has its moments.

Ex-policeman **Dieter Hecking** has left his old-school style of leadership behind and has undergone quite a transformation in dealing with the club's star names.

YOUNG BOYS

SWITZERLAND — GROUP I

Won the Swiss league four times in a row between 1957 and 1960 and reached the European Cup semi-final in 1959, but they've now gone 28 years without the domestic title at **Stade de Suisse** (capacity 32,000).

Uli Forte previously led St Gallen out of the second division at the first attempt and came within a whisker of leading Grasshoppers to the title in 2013.

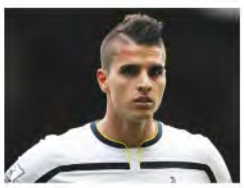
ZURICH

SWITZERLAND — GROUP A

After three league titles in four years, between 2006 and 2009, Zurich now play second fiddle to Basle – although they did beat them in last season's Swiss Cup Final. Home games will be played at **Letzigrund**, which can hold 25,000 fans.

Urs Meier was named first-team boss at the start of 2013 and has overseen a revival at the club. Also spent three years as Liechtenstein's assistant coach.

LEAGUE WINS | CUP WINS

HOW THEY QUALIFIED	TACTICS	KEY PLAYERS
Victories over Norway's Stromsgodset and Aktobe of Kazakhstan raised hopes of the Champions League group stage, but they were crushed in a penalty shoot-out defeat by Ludogorets of Bulgaria.	Galca's Steaua are now a more possession-based team than they were under the previous regime, inspired from the tiki-taka game which brought glory for Barcelona and Spain in the last decade.	■ Captain **Cristian Tanase** (left) is technically accomplished and is an important figure for Steaua and the national team. ■ Despite complicated relationships with many of his coaches, **Lucian Sanmartean** is one of the country's most creative players. ■ **Alexandru Chipciu** can play anywhere and was even used as a false nine by Reghecampf.
Took their chance after Parma's exclusion from the Europa League for financial "irregularities" and made the group phase by beating Sweden's Brommapojkarna 7-0 and RNK Split of Croatia 1-0.	Ventura will rely on the tried-and-tested "Italian" 3-5-2 in which he will risk little and make sure things are secure at the back. The team as a whole will lean heavily on Torino's battling qualities.	■ Attacking right-back **Matteo Darmian** was one of the few Italian successes in Brazil. ■ Belgian-born Morocco striker **Omar El Kaddouri** is an attacking midfielder who scores important goals. ■ With Alessio Cerci having left the club for Atletico Madrid, more weight now rests on the shoulders of striker **Fabio Quagliarella** (left).
Finished sixth last season and beat AEL of Limassol home and away to make it through to the group stage 5-1 on aggregate. However, they did trail twice in the opening leg in Cyprus.	Pochettino wants his side to take on Europe with a style and a swagger, but with one eye on the Premier League he may not always field a full-strength side for Europa League nights, either at home or away.	 ■ Attacking Argentinian midfielder **Erik Lamela** (left) took a while to settle in England, so he has some catching up to do this season. ■ Still only 22, Denmark's **Christian Eriksen** is an exciting attacking midfielder. ■ Pace down the flanks is an important outlet and **Andros Townsen**d will want to impress after missing the World Cup through injury.
After a fourth-place finish in the Turkish league last season, they went into the last qualifying round for the Europa League, where they beat Russia's Rostov 2-0 at home before a goalless draw in the return.	In Halilhodzic's early games, 4-2-3-1 was the order of the day, with many new arrivals. The midfield is policed by Karl Medjani and Kevin Constant, with Deniz Yilmaz a threat from the flanks.	■ Paraguay striker **Oscar Cardozo** was a prolific scorer during seven successful seasons at Benfica. ■ Versatile Belgian midfielder **Kevin Constant** joined from Milan this summer. ■ Portuguese full-back **Jose Bosingwa** (left) has been an ever-present for the club since his summer 2013 move.
Finished sixth in La Liga in their first season back in the Spanish top flight to qualify for the Europa League, and a victory over Astana of Kazakhstan ensured progress to the group stage.	A 4-4-2 helps make the most of Giovani Dos Santos' trickery and the physical presence of Nigerian striker Ikechukwu Uche in attack. Denis Cheryshev, on loan from Real Madrid, has been used on the left wing.	■ Mexican forward **Giovani Dos Santos** (left) has found his feet in La Liga and played an important role in the promoted club's sixth place finish last season. ■ Club captain **Bruno Soriano** is a key figure in defensive midfield. ■ Argentina defender **Mateo Musacchio** was a target for Tottenham this summer.
Fifth place in last season's Bundesliga offered direct entry to the group stage and line up in the Europa League for a fourth time. Their best performance came in 2010 when they reached the quarter-finals.	Normally going with a 4-2-3-1 system, Hecking has produced a side that combines individual finesse with fluidity, hard-running and physical strength. They adopt a very effective high-pressing game.	■ Midfielder **Kevin De Bruyne** is industrious, creative and sharp in front of goal. ■ All-rounder **Aaron Hunt** was recruited on a free after 13 years with Werder Bremen and the new challenge should prove a fillip. ■ As busy, mobile and unselfish as ever, the veteran Croat striker **Ivica Olic** (left) shows no sign of slowing down.
The team from the Swiss capital Berne beat Ermis Aradippou of Cyprus 3-0 on aggregate and then overcame Debrecen of Hungary 3-1 to take their place in the group stage of the competition.	Play with a very flexible formation as Forte likes to move his players around and switch formation. The team can set up to play anything from a 3-4-3 to 3-4-2-1 or even a 4-2-3-1 if necessary.	■ Club captain and goalkeeper **Marco Wolfli** missed the World Cup after suffering an Achilles injury in January. ■ Switzerland centre-half **Steve Von Bergen** returned to his homeland last season after spells in Germany and Italy. ■ Right-back **Scott Sutter** (left) was born in England and moved to Switzerland at 16.
The Swiss Cup winners went straight into the last qualifying round, where they beat Spartak Trnava of the Czech Republic 3-1 away, with a hat-trick from Amine Chermiti, and drew 1-1 at home.	Zurich usually set up in a 3-4-2-1 formation, with Chiumiento and Chikhaoui behind a lone striker. The first-choice centre-back three is normally Raphael Koch, Ivan Kecojevic and Berat Djimsiti.	■ He may be temperamental, but **Mario Gavranovic** (left) has a good scoring record and was in Switzerland's World Cup squad. ■ **Davide Chiumiento** is an attacking midfielder who was raised in Italy and made his professional debut with Juventus. ■ Tunisian winger **Yassine Chikhaoui** has rebuilt his career after a serious knee injury.

BULGARIA

Seventh heaven

Ludogorets have now won seven of the nine domestic trophies they have entered since promotion to the top flight in 2011, beating Botev Plovdiv 3-1 to claim the Bulgarian Super Cup.

FRANCE

Clermont losing start

Corinne Diacre, the first woman to coach a men's professional football team in a competitive match in France, lost her opening game in charge of Clermont as the Ligue 2 side were beaten 2-1 away at Brest.

The 40-year-old replaced Helena Costa, who had been the first female coach to be appointed in the top two divisions of any European league but quit in June, citing a "lack of respect" from the club, whose sporting director had signed players without her consent.

GERMANY

Quick start to season

Karim Bellarabi scored the fastest goal in the

Historic...Clermont's Diacre

€458.5m the cost of Real Madrid's UEFA Super Cup starting XI, said to be the most expensive ever

Club Results

EUROPE

EUROPEAN SUPER CUP

(Champions League winners, Real Madrid v Europa League winners, Sevilla)

Aug 12 - Cardiff (Cardiff City)
Real Madrid (Spa) 2 (Cristiano Ronaldo 30, 49)
Sevilla (Spa) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 30,854. **Ref:** Clattenburg (Eng)
Real Madrid: Casillas - Carvajal, Pepe, Sergio Ramos, Fabio Coentrao (Marcelo 84), Kroos, Modric (Illarramendi 86), Bale, Rodriguez (Isco 72), Cristiano Ronaldo, Benzema.
Sevilla: Beto - Coke (Diogo Figueiras 84), Pareja, Fazio, Fernando Navarro, Krychowiak, Daniel Carrico, Aleix Vidal (Iago Aspas 66), Denis Suarez (Reyes 78), Vitolo, Bacca.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

3rd qualifying round

1st legs - July 29/30; 2nd legs - Aug 5/6
AaB (Den) v Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 0-1, 2-0 (agg 2-1)
AEL (Cyp) v Zenit St Petersburg (Rus) 1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3)
Aktobe (Kaz) v Steaua Bucharest (Rom)
2-2, 1-2 (agg 3-4)
Debrecen (Hun) v BATE Borisov (Bls) 1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3)
Dnipro (Ukr) v Copenhagen (Den) 0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
Feyenoord (Hol) v Besiktas (Tur) 1-2, 1-3 (agg 2-5)
Grasshopper (Swi) v Lille (Fra) 0-2, 1-1 (agg 1-3)
HJK Helsinki (Fin) v APOEL (Cyp) 2-2, 0-2 (agg 2-4)
Legia Warsaw (Pol) v Celtic (Sco) 4-1, 0-3 (awarded[1])
(agg 4-4, Celtic on away goals)
Ludogorets (Bul) v Partizan Belgrade (Ser)
0-0, 2-2 (agg 2-2, Ludogorets on away goals)
Maribor (Sln) v Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr) 1-0, 2-2 (agg 3-2)
Qarabag (Aze) v Salzburg (Aut) 2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)
Slovan Bratislava (Slk) v Sheriff (Mol) 2-1, 0-0 (agg 2-1)
Sparta Prague (CzR) v Malmo (Swe)
4-2, 0-2 (agg 4-4, Malmo on away goals)
Standard Liege (Blg) v Panathinaikos (Gre)
0-0, 2-1 (agg 2-1)
[1]*2nd leg originally finished 2-0 to Legia, but was awarded 3-0 to Celtic because Legia fielded an ineligible player*

Winners entered final qualifying round; losers entered Europa League in final qualifying round

Final qualifying round

1st legs - Aug 19/20; 2nd legs - Aug 26/27
(clubs with country abbreviation entered at this stage)
AaB v APOEL 1-1, 0-4 (agg 1-5)
Besiktas v Arsenal (Eng) 0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Copenhagen v B Leverkusen (Ger) 2-3, 0-4 (agg 2-7)
Lille v Porto (Por) 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)
Maribor v Celtic 1-1, 1-0 (agg 2-1)
Napoli (Ita) v Athletic Bilbao (Spa) 1-1, 1-3 (agg 2-4)
Salzburg v Malmo 2-1, 0-3 (agg 2-4)
Slovan Bratislava v BATE Borisov 1-1, 0-3 (agg 1-4)
Standard Liege v Zenit St Petersburg 0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4)
Steaua Bucharest v Ludogorets
1-0, 0-1 (aet) (agg 1-1, Ludogorets 6-5 on pens)

Winners qualified for group stage; losers enter Europa League at the group stage

Group stage fixtures

Group A
Sep 16: Juventus (Ita) v Malmo (Swe); Olympiakos (Gre) v Atletico Madrid (Spa).
Oct 1: At Madrid v Juventus; Malmo v Olympiakos.
Oct 22: At Madrid v Malmo; Olympiakos v Juventus.
Nov 4: Juventus v Olympiakos; Malmo v At Madrid.
Nov 26: At Madrid v Olympiakos; Malmo v Juventus.
Dec 9: Juventus v At Madrid; Olympiakos v Malmo.

Group B
Sep 16: Liverpool (Eng) v Ludogorets (Bul); Real Madrid (Spa) v Basle (Swi).
Oct 1: Basle v Liverpool; Ludogorets v R Madrid.
Oct 22: Liverpool v R Madrid; Ludogorets v Basle
Nov 4: Basle v Ludogorets; R Madrid v Liverpool.
Nov 26: Basle v R Madrid; Ludogorets v Liverpool.
Dec 9: Liverpool v Basle; R Madrid v Ludogorets.

Group C
Sep 16: Benfica (Por) v Zenit St Petersburg (Rus); Monaco (Fra) v Bayer Leverkusen (Ger).
Oct 1: Leverkusen v Benfica; Zenit v Monaco.
Oct 22: Leverkusen v Zenit; Monaco v Benfica.
Nov 4: Benfica v Monaco; Zenit v Leverkusen.
Nov 26: Leverkusen v Monaco; Zenit v Benfica.
Dec 9: Benfica v Leverkusen; Monaco v Zenit.

Group D
Sep 16: Borussia Dortmund (Ger) v Arsenal (Eng); Galatasaray (Tur) v Anderlecht (Blg).
Oct 1: Anderlecht v Dortmund; Arsenal v Galatasaray.
Oct 22: Anderlecht v Arsenal; Galatasaray v Dortmund.
Nov 4: Arsenal v Anderlecht; Dortmund v Galatasaray.
Nov 26: Anderlecht v Galatasaray; Arsenal v Dortmund.
Dec 9: Dortmund v Anderlecht; Galatasaray v Arsenal.

Group E
Sep 17: Bayern Munich (Ger) v Manchester City (Eng); Roma (Ita) v CSKA Moscow (Rus).
Sep 30: CSKA v Bayern; Manchester City v Roma.
Oct 21: CSKA v Manchester City; Roma v Bayern.
Nov 5: Bayern v Roma; Manchester City v CSKA.
Nov 25: CSKA v Roma; Manchester City v Bayern.
Dec 10: Bayern v CSKA; Roma v Manchester City.

Group F
Sep 17: Ajax (Hol) v Paris Saint-Germain (Fra); Barcelona (Spa) v APOEL (Cyp).
Sep 30: APOEL v Ajax; PSG v Barcelona.
Oct 21: APOEL v PSG; Barcelona v Ajax.
Nov 5: Ajax v Barcelona; PSG v APOEL.
Nov 25: APOEL v Barcelona; PSG v Ajax.
Dec 10: Ajax v APOEL; Barcelona v PSG.

Group G
Sep 17: Chelsea (Eng) v Schalke (Ger); Maribor (Sln) v Sporting Lisbon (Por).
Sep 30: Schalke v Maribor; Sporting v Chelsea.
Oct 21: Chelsea v Maribor; Schalke v Sporting.
Nov 5: Maribor v Chelsea; Sporting v Schalke.
Nov 25: Schalke v Chelsea; Sporting v Maribor.
Dec 10: Chelsea v Sporting; Maribor v Schalke.

Group H
Sep 17: Athletic Bilbao (Spa) v Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr); Porto (Por) v BATE Borisov (Bls).
Sep 30: BATE v Athletic; Shakhtar v Porto.
Oct 21: BATE v Shakhtar; Porto v Athletic.
Nov 5: Athletic v Porto; Shakhtar v BATE.
Nov 25: BATE v Porto; Shakhtar v Athletic.
Dec 10: Athletic v BATE; Porto v Shakhtar.

Top 2 in each group qualify for 1st knockout round; 3rd-placed teams enter Europa League at 1st knockout round stage

EUROPA LEAGUE

3rd qualifying round

1st legs - July 31; 2nd legs - Aug 7
Astana (Kaz) v AIK (Swe) 1-1, 3-0 (agg 4-1); Astra (Rom) v Slovan Liberec (CzR) 3-0, 3-2 (agg 6-2); Brommapojkarna (Swe) v Torino (Ita) 0-3, 0-4 (agg 0-7); Club Brugge (Blg) v Brondby (Den) 3-0, 2-0 (agg 5-0); Dinamo Minsk (Bls) v CFR Cluj (Rom) 1-0, 2-0 (agg 3-0); Diosgyor (Hun) v Krasnodar (Rus) 1-5, 0-3 (agg 1-8); Dynamo Moscow (Rus) v Kiryat Shmona (Isr) 1-1, 2-1 (agg 3-2); Elfsborg (Swe) v FH (Ice) 4-1, 1-2 (agg 5-3); Grodig (Aut) v Zimbru (Mol) 1-2, 1-0 (agg 2-2, Zimbru on away goals); IFK Gothenburg (Swe) v Rio Ave (Por) 0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1); Karabukspor (Tur) v Rosenborg (Nor) 0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1, Karabukspor on away goals); Mainz (Ger) v Asteras (Gre) 1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3); Mlada Boleslav (CzR) v Lyon (Fra) 1-4, 1-2 (agg 2-6); Neftchi (Aze) v Chikhura (Geo) 0-0, 3-2 (agg 3-2); Omonia (Cyp) v Metalurg Skopje (Mac) 3-0, 1-0 (agg 4-0); Petrolul (Rom) v Plzen (CzR) 1-1, 4-1 (agg 5-2); PSV Eindhoven (Hol) v St Polten (Aut) 1-0, 3-2 (agg 4-2); Real Sociedad (Spa) v Aberdeen (Sco) 2-0, 3-2 (agg 5-2); Ruch Chorzow (Pol) v Esbjerg (Den) 0-0, 2-2 (agg 2-2, Ruch on away goals); Sarajevo (Bos) v Atromitos (Gre) 1-2, 3-1 (aet) (agg 4-3); Shakhter (Kaz) v Hajduk Split (Cro) 4-2, 0-3 (agg 4-5); Split (Cro) v Chornomorets (Ukr) 2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0); St Johnstone (Sco) v Spartak Trnava (Slk) 1-2, 1-1 (agg 2-3); Stjarnan (Ice) v Lech Poznan (Pol) 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0); Trencin (Slk) v Hull City (Eng) 0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2); Vikingur (Far) v Rijeka (Cro) 1-5, 0-4 (agg 1-9); Young Boys (Swi) v Ermis (Cyp) 1-0, 2-0 (agg 3-0); Zorya (Ukr) v Molde (Nor) 1-1, 2-1 (agg 3-2); Zulte Waregem (Blg) v Shakhtyor (Bls) 2-5, 2-2 (agg 4-7).

Final qualifying round

1st legs - Aug 20/21; 2nd legs - Aug 28
*(clubs with country abbreviation entered at this stage, from Champions League if marked with *)*
AEL* (Cyp) v Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) 1-2, 0-3 (agg 1-5); Aktobe* (Kaz) v Legia Warsaw* (Pol) 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3); Apollon (Cyp) v Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus) 1-1, 4-1 (agg 5-2); Astana v Villarreal (Spa) 0-3, 0-4 (agg 0-7); Asteras v Maccabi Tel Aviv* (Isr) 2-0, 1-3 (agg 3-3, Asteras on away goals); Dinamo Minsk v Nacional (Por) 2-0, 3-2 (agg 5-2); Dnipro* (Ukr) v Hajduk Split 2-1, 0-0 (agg 2-1); Dynamo Moscow v Omonia 2-2, 2-1 (agg 4-3); Elfsborg v Rio Ave 2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2, Rio Ave on away goals); Grasshopper* (Swi) v Club Brugge 1-2, 0-1 (agg 1-3); HJK Helsinki* (Fin) v Rapid Vienna (Aut) 2-1, 3-3 (agg 5-4); Karabukspor v Saint-Etienne (Fra) 1-0, 0-1 (aet) (agg 1-1, Saint-Etienne 4-3 on pens); Lokeren (Blg) v Hull City 1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, Lokeren on away goals); Lyon v Astra 1-2, 1-0 (agg 2-2, Astra on away goals); Panathinaikos* (Gre) v Midtjylland (Den) 4-1, 2-1 (agg 6-2); Partizan Belgrade* (Ser) v Neftchi 3-2, 2-1 (agg 5-3); Petrolul v Dinamo Zagreb* (Cro) 1-3, 1-2 (agg 2-5); PSV Eindhoven v Shakhtyor 1-0, 2-0 (agg 3-0); Qarabag* (Aze) v Twente Enschede (Hol) 0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1, Qarabag on away goals); Real Sociedad v Krasnodar 1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3); Rijeka v Sheriff* (Mol) 1-0, 3-0 (agg 4-0); Ruch Chorzow v Metalist (Ukr) 0-0, 0-1 (aet) (agg 0-1); Sarajevo v Monchengladbach (Ger) 2-3, 0-7 (agg 2-10); Spartak Trnava v Zurich (Swi) 1-3, 1-1 (agg 2-4); Split v Torino 0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1); Stjarnan v Internazionale (Ita) 0-3, 0-6 (agg 0-9); Trabzonspor (Tur) v Rostov (Rus) 2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0); Young Boys v Debrecen* (Hun) 3-1, 0-0 (agg 3-1); Zimbru v PAOK Salonika (Gre) 1-0, 0-4 (agg 1-4); Zorya v Feyenoord* (Hol) 1-1, 3-4 (agg 4-5); Zwolle (Hol) v Sparta Prague* (CzR) 1-1, 1-3 (agg 2-4).

AUSTRIA

Aug 2: Admira 1 Rapid 1; Austria 0 Altach 0; Sturm 4 Wiener Neustadt 2; Ried 0 Salzburg 2.
Aug 3: Grodig 0 Wolfsberger 2.
Aug 9: Wiener Neustadt 2 Austria 2; Rapid 1 Sturm 1; Ried 1 Admira 1; Altach 1 Wolfsberger 2.
Aug 10: Salzburg 8 Grodig 0.
Aug 13: Altach 0 Admira 2.
Aug 16: Rapid 0 Altach 1; Grodig 3 Wiener Neustadt 0; Admira 0 Salzburg 3; Wolfsberger 4 Ried 1.
Aug 17: Sturm 1 Austria 1.
Aug 23: Sturm 1 Wolfsberger 2; Salzburg 5 Altach 0; Wiener Neustadt 5 Admira 4; Ried 2 Grodig 2.
Aug 24: Austria 2 Rapid 2.

AUSTRIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salzburg	6	6	0	0	29	1	18
Wolfsberger	6	6	0	0	18	4	18
Grodig	6	2	2	2	8	14	8
Altach	6	2	1	3	3	9	7
Rapid	6	1	3	2	6	11	6
Sturm	6	1	2	3	8	9	5
Ried	6	1	2	3	7	11	5
Austria	6	0	5	1	6	10	5
Admira	6	1	2	3	9	14	5
W Neustadt	6	1	1	4	10	21	4

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated

BELGIUM

Regular season
Aug 1: Oostende 0 Anderlecht 2.
Aug 2: Kortrijk 2 Standard 3; Genk 1 Cercle Brugge 1; Charleroi 2 Westerlo 3; Mouscron Peruwelz 1 Waasland-Beveren 0.
Aug 3: Lokeren 2 Zulte Waregem 1; Club Brugge 1 Lierse 0; Gent 3 Mechelen 1.
Aug 8: Genk 0 Lokeren 0.
Aug 9: Mechelen 1 Kortrijk 2; Lierse 2 Mouscron Peruwelz 2; Waasland-Beveren 1 Westerlo 1; Cercle Brugge 0 Oostende 1.
Aug 10: Standard 0 Gent 1; Anderlecht 1 Charleroi 0; Zulte Waregem 1 Club Brugge 1.
Aug 15: Mouscron Peruwelz 5 Standard 2; Club Brugge 1 Cercle Brugge 1.
Aug 16: Kortrijk 1 Genk 1; Oostende 2 Mechelen 0; Charleroi 2 Waasland-Beveren 2; Lokeren 2 Lierse 0.
Aug 17: Gent 3 Zulte Waregem 1; Westerlo 2 Anderlecht 2.
Aug 22: Genk 3 Gent 2.
Aug 23: Standard 2 Westerlo 2; Zulte Waregem 1 Mouscron Peruwelz 1; Kortrijk 0 Oostende 2; Lierse 0 Charleroi 2.
Aug 24: Anderlecht 1 Waasland-Beveren 0; Mechelen 3 Club Brugge 1; Cercle Brugge 1 Lokeren 0.

history of the German top flight, taking just nine seconds to put Bayer Leverkusen ahead away at Borussia Dortmund as they won 2-1 on the opening weekend of the new Bundesliga campaign.

"There was no luck," explained Leverkusen coach Roger Schmidt afterwards. "We aimed to attack right from the start of the game."

Fastest goal...Bellarabi

ICELAND

KR's 14th cup success

KR's Kjartan Henry Finnbogason struck in injury time to give the club from Reykjavik a 2-1 victory over Keflavik in the Icelandic Cup Final. Gretar Sigurdsson had equalised after Hordur Sveinsson gave Keflavik the lead before Finnbogason secured a 14th Cup success for his side.

MALTA

Super Cup revenge

Birkirkara gained some revenge for losing the league title on the final day of last season with a 2-1 victory over double winners Valletta in the Maltese Super Cup.

Hibernians goalkeeper Mario Muscat announced his retirement after he became the first player to appear in 500 games in the Maltese top flight.

The 38-year-old former international, who won four league titles and the Maltese Cup five times, brought the curtain down on his career with a 2-1 home victory against Qormi. "I still feel fit to go on for one or two seasons" said Muscat. "However, coaching will definitely be my next step."

BELGIUM – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht	5	4	1	0	9	3	13
Gent	5	3	1	1	9	5	10
Westerlo	5	2	3	0	9	7	9
Oostende	5	3	0	2	5	4	9
Mouscron P	5	2	2	1	10	8	8
Club Brugge	5	2	2	1	6	5	8
Lokeren	5	2	1	2	4	3	7
Standard	5	2	1	2	10	10	7
Cercle Brugge	5	1	3	1	3	3	6
Mechelen	5	2	0	3	8	9	6
Genk	5	1	3	1	6	7	6
Zulte Waregem	5	1	2	2	6	7	5
Charleroi	5	1	1	3	6	9	4
Lierse	5	1	1	3	4	7	4
Kortrijk	5	1	1	3	5	9	4
Waasland-B	5	0	2	3	3	7	2

30-round regular season (15x2); top 6 will form championship group, 7th to 14th will enter Europa League-place play-offs, 15th & 16th (bottom 2) will enter relegation play-off series (the winners of which will enter rel/prom play-offs, the losers will go down)

CZECH REPUBLIC

Aug 1: Slavia 3 Ostrava 1.
Aug 2: Slovacko 4 Bohemians 1905 1; Brno 3 Hradec Kralove 0; Sparta 3 Jihlava 0.
Aug 3: Liberec 0 Pribram 0; Mlada Boleslav 0 Dukla 1; Plzen 3 Jablonec 1.
Aug 8: Jihlava 1 Bohemians 1905 2; Ostrava 1 Teplice 1.
Aug 9: Jablonec 1 Slovacko 1; Dukla 1 Brno 1; Pribram 0 Sparta 1.
Aug 10: Ceske Budejovice 0 Plzen 4; Hradec Kralove 0 Mlada Boleslav 0; Slavia 4 Liberec 1.
Aug 15: Liberec 0 Dukla 0; Sparta 0 Ostrava 1.
Aug 16: Bohemians 1905 1 Jablonec 2; Slovacko 2 Jihlava 0; Brno 2 Ceske Budejovice 2; Mlada Boleslav 4 Pribram 1; Teplice 2 Slavia 1.
Aug 17: Plzen 4 Hradec Kralove 0.
Aug 22: Ostrava 1 Brno 0; Teplice 2 Liberec 2.
Aug 23: Jablonec 2 Jihlava 0; Ceske Budejovice 2 Mlada Boleslav 1; Hradec Kralove 2 Slovacko 0; Slavia 1 Plzen 0; Pribram 2 Bohemians 1905 3.
Aug 24: Dukla 1 Sparta 0.

CZECH REPUBLIC

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slavia	5	4	0	1	11	5	12
Plzen	5	3	1	1	13	4	10
Jablonec	5	3	1	1	8	5	10
Sparta	5	3	0	2	6	3	9
Dukla	5	2	3	0	3	1	9
Ostrava	5	2	2	1	4	4	8
Slovacko	5	2	1	2	8	6	7
M Boleslav	5	2	1	2	6	4	7
Teplice	4	1	3	0	5	4	6
Boh'ians 1905	5	2	0	3	8	11	6
Brno	5	1	2	2	6	6	5
C Budejovice	4	1	2	1	5	8	5
H Kralove	5	1	2	2	2	7	5
Liberec	5	0	4	1	4	7	4
Pribram	5	0	2	3	5	10	2
Jihlava	5	0	0	5	1	10	0

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

DENMARK

Aug 1: Silkeborg 0 SonderjyskE 2.
Aug 2: Vestsjaelland 2 Copenhagen 2; OB 1 AaB 1.
Aug 3: Nordsjaelland 3 Esbjerg 2; Hobro 2 Brondby 0.
Aug 4: Midtjylland 3 Randers 1.
Aug 8: Randers 1 Vestsjaelland 0.
Aug 9: AaB 1 Nordsjaelland 2.
Aug 10: SonderjyskE 1 Midtjylland 3; Copenhagen 0 Hobro 3; Brondby 1 OB 1.
Aug 11: Esbjerg 0 Silkeborg 0.
Aug 15: Copenhagen 1 Midtjylland 2.
Aug 16: AaB 1 Esbjerg 1.
Aug 17: Vestsjaelland 2 Silkeborg 0; Brondby 2 SonderjyskE 0; Randers 0 OB 2.
Aug 18: Hobro 0 Nordsjaelland 0.

DENMARK

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Midtjylland	5	4	0	1	11	6	12
Hobro	5	3	1	1	8	3	10
Nordsjaelland	5	3	1	1	9	7	10
Randers	5	3	0	2	5	6	9
Vestsjaelland	5	2	1	2	9	7	7
Brondby	5	2	1	2	6	6	7
AaB	5	1	3	1	5	4	6
OB	5	1	2	2	6	7	5
SonderjyskE	5	1	2	2	4	6	5
Copenhagen	5	1	2	2	5	8	5
Esbjerg	5	0	3	2	4	6	3
Silkeborg	5	0	2	3	0	6	2

33-round season (11x3); bottom 2 will be relegated

ENGLAND

Saturday, August 16

Arsenal 2 (Koscielny 45+1, Ramsey 90+1)
Crystal Palace 1 (Hangeland 35) Att: 59,962

Leicester 2 (Ulloa 22, Wood 86)
Everton 2 (McGeady 20, Naismith 45) Att: 31,603

Manchester United 1 (Rooney 53)
Swansea 2 (Ki 28, Sigurdsson 72) Att: 75,339

Queens Park Rangers 0
Hull 1 (Chester 52) Att: 17,603

Stoke 0
Aston Villa 1 (Weimann 50) Att: 27,478

West Bromwich 2 (Berahino pen 42, 74)
Sunderland 2 (Cattermole 5, Larsson 85)
Att: 25,468

West Ham 0
Tottenham 1 (Dier 90+3) Att: 34,977

Sunday, August 17

Liverpool 2 (Sterling 23, Sturridge 79)
Southampton 1 (Clyne 56) Att: 44,736

Newcastle 0
Manchester City 2 (Silva 38, Aguero 90+2)
Att: 50,816

Monday, August 18

Burnley 1 (Arfield 14)
Chelsea 3 (Diego Costa 17, Schurrle 21, Ivanovic 34) Att: 20,699

Saturday, August 23

Aston Villa 0
Newcastle 0 Att: 30,267

Chelsea 2 (Diego Costa 62, Hazard 77)
Leicester 0 Att: 41,604

Crystal Palace 1 (Chamakh 48)
West Ham 3 (Zarate 34, Downing 37, Cole 62)
Att: 24,242

Everton 2 (Coleman 19, Naismith 45)
Arsenal 2 (Ramsey 83, Giroud 90) Att: 39,490

Southampton 0
West Bromwich 0 Att: 27,598

Swansea 1 (Dyer 23)
Burnley 0 Att: 20,565

Sunday, August 24

Hull 1 (Jelavic 42)
Stoke 1 (Shawcross 83) Att: 24,348

Sunderland 1 (Rodwell 30)
Manchester United 1 (Mata 17) Att: 43,217

Tottenham 4 (Chadli 12, 37, Dier 30, Adebayor 65)
Queens Park Rangers 0 Att: 36,109

Monday, August 25

Manchester City 3 (Jovetic 41, 55, Aguero 69)
Liverpool 1 (Zabaleta og 83) Att: 45,471

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tottenham	2	2	0	0	5	0	6
Chelsea	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Man City	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Swansea	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Arsenal	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Hull	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Aston Villa	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
West Ham	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Liverpool	2	1	0	1	3	4	3
Everton	2	0	2	0	4	4	2
Sunderland	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
West Brom	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Man United	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Southampton	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Stoke	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Leicester	2	0	1	1	2	4	1
Newcastle	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Crystal Palace	2	0	0	2	2	5	0
Burnley	2	0	0	2	1	4	0
QPR	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading goalscorers

2 Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)
Saido Berahino (West Bromwich)
Nacer Chadli (Tottenham)
Diego Costa (Chelsea)
Eric Dier (Tottenham)
Stevan Jovetic (Manchester City)
Steven Naismith (Everton)
Aaron Ramsey (Arsenal)

COMMUNITY SHIELD

Aug 10 - London (Wembley)
Arsenal 3 (Cazorla 22, Ramsey 43, Giroud 62)
Manchester City 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 71,523. **Ref:** Oliver

FRANCE

Friday, August 8

Reims 2 (Oniangue 22, Devaux 34)
Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Ibrahimovic 7, 63)
Att: 18,540

Saturday, August 9

Bastia 3 (Maboulou 9, 73, Tallo pen 66)
Marseille 3 (Gignac 12, pen 62, Romaric og 17)
Att: 15,537

Evian TG 0
Caen 3 (Kante 12, Duhamel 32, 37) Att: 9,915

Guingamp 0
Saint-Etienne 2 (Erdinc pen 39, 90+2) Att: 16,852

Lille 0
Metz 0 Att: 34,327

Montpellier 0
Bordeaux 1 (Diabate 17) Att: 15,190

Nantes 1 (Bammou 65)
Lens 0 Att: 27,964

Nice 3 (Cvitanich 23, 63, Bosetti 69)
Toulouse 2 (Braithwaite 44, Ben Yedder 45)
Att: 19,474

Sunday, August 10

Lyon 2 (Malbranque 64, Lacazette pen 74)
Rennes 0 Att: 27,811

Monaco 1 (Falcao pen 78)
Lorient 2 (Aboubakar pen 9, Lavigne 87) Att: 13,960

Friday, August 15

Caen 0
Lille 1 (Origi pen 69) Att: 12,664

Saturday, August 16

Lens 0
Guingamp 1 (Douniama 90+3) Att: 9,512

Lorient 0
Nice 0 Att: 13,885

Metz 1 (Ngbakoto 12)
Nantes 1 (Veretout 3) Att: 20,329

Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Lucas Moura 26, Cavani 57)
Bastia 0 Att: 45,258

Rennes 6 (Toivonen 7, 57, Mexer 40, 44, Ntep 76, 87)
Evian TG 2 (Wass 35, 83) Att: 17,591

Toulouse 2 (Akpa Akpro 10, Ben Yedder 45)
Lyon 1 (Lacazette 77) Att: 13,283

Sunday, August 17

Bordeaux 4 (Rolan 48, 65, Sala pen 61, Khazri pen 75)
Monaco 1 (Berbatov 45) Att: 28,287

Marseille 0
Montpellier 2 (Mounier 19, Sanson 69) Att: 50,774

Saint-Etienne 3 (Gradel 60, Monnet-Paquet 70, Erdinc 81)
Reims 1 (Perrin og 27) Att: 33,810

Friday, August 22

Evian TG 0
Paris Saint-Germain 0 Att: 14,600

Saturday, August 23

Bastia 1 (Boudebouz pen 24)
Toulouse 0 Att: 13,813

Guingamp 0
Marseille 1 (Gignac 46) Att: 16,901

Lille 2 (Delaplace 58, Kjaer 74)
Lorient 0 Att: 34,860

Montpellier 2 (Tiene 44, Camara 89)
Metz 0 Att: 12,337

Nice 1 (Bosetti 11)
Bordeaux 3 (Diabate pen 32, Maurice-Belay 47, Sertic 55) Att: 22,712

Reims 0
Caen 2 (Kante 83, Bazile 90+2) Att: 12,015

PORTUGAL

Three penalty saves

Artur saved three penalties as Benfica won the Super Cup on spot-kicks after a goalless draw with Rio Ave.

ROMANIA

Six-goal haul

Steaua Bucharest striker Claudiu Keseru set a new club record as the 27-year-old scored all six goals in his side's 6-0 win against Pandurii Targu Jiu. Steaua's previous best was five goals in a game – which was set by the current coach Constantin Galca over 20 years ago.

Keseru's six-goal haul also equalled the national record held by Marian Popa, who scored six for Farul Constanta against Otelul Galati in 1993.

Six-shooter...Keseru

RUSSIA

Torpedo hit for eight

Zenit equalled their best-ever Russian Premier League result as they thrashed Torpedo Moscow 8-1 in a game that was played behind closed doors after crowd trouble at the end of last season.

Zenit striker Aleksandr Kerzhakov scored twice in the rout to become the club's all-time record scorer with 160 goals in all competitions.

SCOTLAND

Kerr gets Uni job

Shelley Kerr became the first female manager of a senior side in Scottish football when she took charge of Lowland Football League side Stirling University.

Sunday, August 24

Lyon 0
Lens 1 (Nomenjanahary 11) Att: 24,636

Nantes 0
Monaco 1 (Falcao 45) Att: 27,042

Saint-Etienne 0
Rennes 0 Att: 31,037

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bordeaux	3	3	0	0	8	2	9
Saint-Etienne	3	2	1	0	5	1	7
Lille	3	2	1	0	3	0	7
Caen	3	2	0	1	5	1	6
Montpellier	3	2	0	1	4	1	6
PSG	3	1	2	0	4	2	5
Rennes	3	1	1	1	6	4	4
Nantes	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Bastia	3	1	1	1	4	5	4
Marseille	3	1	1	1	4	5	4
Nice	3	1	1	1	4	5	4
Lorient	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
Lyon	3	1	0	2	3	3	3
Toulouse	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
Lens	3	1	0	2	1	2	3
Guingamp	3	1	0	2	1	3	3
Monaco	3	1	0	2	3	6	3
Metz	3	0	2	1	1	3	2
Reims	3	0	1	2	3	7	1
Evian TG	3	0	1	2	2	9	1

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading goalscorers

3 Mevlut Erdinc (Saint-Etienne)
Andre-Pierre Gignac (Marseille)

SUPER CUP

Aug 2 - Beijing, China (Workers)
Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Ibrahimovic 9, pen 20)
Guingamp 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 39,752. **Ref:** Turpin

GERMANY

Friday, August 22

Bayern Munich 2 (Muller 37, Robben 47)
Wolfsburg 1 (Olic 52) Att: 71,000

Saturday, August 23

Borussia Dortmund 0
Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Bellarabi 1, Kiessling 90+5) Att: 80,667

Cologne 0
Hamburg 0 Att: 50,000

Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Seferovic 15)
Freiburg 0 Att: 46,200

Hanover 2 (Prib 67, Joselu 70)
Schalke 1 (Huntelaar 47) Att: 49,000

Hertha Berlin 2 (Schieber 16, 47)
Werder Bremen 2 (Lukimya 53, Di Santo 55) Att: 59,672

Hoffenheim 2 (Szalai 33, Elyounoussi 35)
Augsburg 0 Att: 23,792

Sunday, August 24

Monchengladbach 1 (Kramer 90)
Stuttgart 1 (Maxim 51) Att: 50,203

Paderborn 2 (Kachunga 37, Hunemeier 87)
Mainz 2 (Okazaki 33, Koo pen 90+4) Att: 14,824

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hoffenheim	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Leverkusen	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Bayern	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Hanover	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Eintracht	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Hertha	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Mainz	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Paderborn	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Werder	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
M'gladbach	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Stuttgart	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Cologne	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Hamburg	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Schalke	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Wolfsburg	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Freiburg	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Augsburg	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Dortmund	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

34-round season (17x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

Leading goalscorer

2 Julian Schieber (Hertha Berlin)

SUPER CUP

Aug 13 - Dortmund (Signal Iduna)
Borussia Dortmund 2 (Mkhitaryan 23, Aubameyang 62)
Bayern Munich 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 80,667. **Ref:** Gagelmann

GREECE

Aug 23: OFI 1 Panetolikos 0; Kerkyra 2 Panthrakikos 1; Olympiakos 3 Niki 1.
Aug 24: Veria 3 Xanthi 2; Giannina 3 Asteras 1; Atromitos 1 Platanias 0; PAOK 1 Kalloni 1; Levadiakos 1 Panathinaikos 1.
Aug 25: Panionios 2 Ergotelis 1.

GREECE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Giannina	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Olympiakos	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Veria	1	1	0	0	3	2	3
Kerkyra	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Panionios	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Atromitos	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
OFI	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Kalloni	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Levadiakos	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Panathinaikos	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
PAOK	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Xanthi	1	0	0	1	2	3	0
Ergotelis	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Panthrakikos	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Panetolikos	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Platanias	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Asteras	1	0	0	1	1	3	0
Niki	1	0	0	1	1	3	0

34-round season (17x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

HOLLAND

Aug 8: Zwolle 2 Utrecht 0.
Aug 9: Heerenveen 1 Dordrecht 2; NAC 1 Excelsior 1; Cambuur 1 Twente 1; Heracles 0 AZ 3.
Aug 10: Den Haag 0 Feyenoord 1; Ajax 4 Vitesse 1; Go Ahead Eagles 2 Groningen 3; Willem II 1 PSV 3.
Aug 15: Feyenoord 1 Heerenveen 1.
Aug 16: PSV 6 NAC 1; Dordrecht 1 Zwolle 2; Twente 2 Den Haag 2; Vitesse 2 Cambuur 2.
Aug 17: AZ 1 Ajax 3; Utrecht 2 Willem II 1; Excelsior 3 Go Ahead Eagles 2; Groningen 3 Heracles 1.
Aug 22: Heracles 0 Cambuur 1.
Aug 23: Willem II 3 AZ 0; Heerenveen 2 Excelsior 0; Go Ahead Eagles 0 Dordrecht 0.
Aug 24: Zwolle 2 Vitesse 1; Feyenoord 1 Utrecht 2; NAC 1 Twente 1; Den Haag 3 Groningen 0; Ajax 1 PSV 3.

HOLLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSV	3	3	0	0	12	3	9
Zwolle	3	3	0	0	6	2	9
Ajax	3	2	0	1	8	5	6
Groningen	3	2	0	1	6	6	6
Utrecht	3	2	0	1	4	4	6
Cambuur	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
Den Haag	3	1	1	1	5	3	4
Heerenveen	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Dordrecht	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Feyenoord	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Excelsior	3	1	1	1	4	5	4
Willem II	3	1	0	2	5	5	3
Twente	3	0	3	0	4	4	3
AZ	3	1	0	2	4	6	3
NAC	3	0	2	1	3	8	2
Go Ahead	3	0	1	2	4	6	1
Vitesse	3	0	1	2	4	8	1
Heracles	3	0	0	3	1	7	0

34-round season (17x2); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd & 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

SUPER CUP

Aug 3 - Amsterdam (Arena)
Ajax 0
Zwolle 1 (Nijland 55)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 42,000. **Ref:** Makkelie

ICELAND

ICELANDIC CUP

Final

Aug 16 - Reykjavik (Laugardalsvollur)
KR 2 (Sigurdsson 17, Finnbogason 90+1)
Keflavik 1 (Sveinsson 13)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 4,694. **Ref:** Hinriksson

NORWAY

July 29: Valerenga 3 Stabaek 2.
Aug 1: Lillestrom 4 Brann 3.
Aug 2: Stromsgodset 1 Sogndal 1; Viking 5 Valerenga 5.
Aug 3: Odd 3 Sandnes Ulf 1; Start 1 Molde 1; Sarpsborg 0 Haugesund 2; Aalesund 2 Bodo/Glimt 1; Stabaek 4 Rosenborg 1.
Aug 8: Brann 1 Aalesund 0.
Aug 9: Valerenga 2 Sarpsborg 2; Odd 1 Stromsgodset 0.
Aug 10: Molde 2 Stabaek 2; Rosenborg 3 Start 2; Sogndal 0 Bodo/Glimt 1; Sandnes Ulf 0 Lillestrom 0; Haugesund 1 Viking 1.
Aug 15: Start 2 Stromsgodset 3.
Aug 16: Viking 4 Sogndal 2; Aalesund 3 Haugesund 0.
Aug 17: Stabaek 1 Odd 3; Brann 3 Rosenborg 1; Bodo/Glimt 1 Sandnes Ulf 1; Sarpsborg 0 Molde 2; Lillestrom 2 Valerenga 1.
Aug 22: Sandnes Ulf 2 Viking 2.
Aug 23: Stromsgodset 2 Stabaek 3; Valerenga 3 Brann 3.
Aug 24: Odd 4 Start 1; Haugesund 1 Bodo/Glimt 2; Rosenborg 2 Sarpsborg 0; Sogndal 0 Lillestrom 1; Molde 5 Aalesund 0.

NORWAY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Molde	21	15	5	1	48	16	50
Odd	21	13	5	3	34	18	44
Stromsgodset	21	11	4	6	34	27	37
Rosenborg	21	10	6	5	42	35	36
Lillestrom	21	9	7	5	32	22	34
Valerenga	21	8	9	4	44	34	33
Viking	21	7	11	3	33	25	32
Stabaek	21	8	2	11	33	42	26
Bodo/Glimt	21	7	4	10	30	36	25
Sarpsborg	21	6	7	8	27	37	25
Start	21	6	4	11	31	43	22
Haugesund	21	5	6	10	29	32	21
Aalesund	21	5	6	10	22	29	21
Sogndal	21	5	5	11	21	33	20
Brann	21	5	4	12	28	38	19
Sandnes Ulf	21	2	7	12	17	38	13

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

POLAND

Regular season

Aug 1: Jagiellonia 2 Cracovia 1; Piast 1 Lechia 3.
Aug 2: Korona 2 Pogon 2; Legia 1 Gornik Zabrze 1.
Aug 3: Podbeskidzie 3 Ruch 0; Slask 2 Zawisza 1; Lech 2 Wisla 3.
Aug 4: Gornik Leczna 1 Belchatow 1.
Aug 8: Cracovia 2 Korona 1; Gornik Zabrze 3 Jagiellonia 0.
Aug 9: Belchatow 2 Slask 0; Legia 5 Gornik Leczna 0.
Aug 10: Zawisza 1 Podbeskidzie 2; Lechia 1 Lech 2; Wisla 2 Ruch 2.
Aug 11: Pogon 0 Piast 0.
Aug 15: Korona 0 Gornik Zabrze 3; Jagiellonia 0 Legia 3.
Aug 16: Gornik Leczna 5 Zawisza 2; Piast 0 Ruch 1; Lech 1 Pogon 1.
Aug 17: Slask 0 Cracovia 0; Wisla 3 Lechia 1.
Aug 18: Podbeskidzie 1 Belchatow 1.
Aug 22: Zawisza 0 Lechia 2; Pogon 0 Wisla 3.
Aug 23: Cracovia 1 Podbeskidzie 3; Gornik Zabrze 2 Gornik Leczna 0; Jagiellonia 1 Slask 3.
Aug 24: Legia 2 Korona 0; Ruch 0 Lech 0.
Aug 25: Belchatow 0 Piast 0.

POLAND – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gornik Zabrze	6	4	2	0	12	2	14
Legia	6	4	1	1	14	3	13
Wisla	6	3	3	0	13	7	12
Belchatow	6	3	3	0	7	2	12
Podbeskidzie	6	3	1	2	11	7	10
Lechia	6	3	1	2	10	8	10
Slask	6	3	1	2	8	8	10
Lech	6	2	3	1	10	6	9
Pogon	6	2	3	1	10	9	9
Gornik Leczna	6	2	2	2	9	12	8
Jagiellonia	6	2	1	3	8	13	7
Ruch	6	1	2	3	4	9	5
Cracovia	6	1	1	4	5	11	4
Zawisza	6	1	0	5	7	14	3
Piast	6	0	3	3	2	9	3
Korona	6	0	1	5	3	13	1

30-round regular season (15x2); top 8 will form championship group, bottom 8 will form relegation group (from which the bottom 2 will go down)

PORTUGAL

Aug 15: Porto 2 Maritimo 0.
Aug 16: Gil Vicente 1 Guimaraes 3; Academica 1 Sporting 1.
Aug 17: Nacional 0 Moreirense 1; Rio Ave 2 Setubal 0; Penafiel 1 Belenenses 3; Braga 3 Boavista 0; Benfica 2 Pacos de Ferreira 0.

Qualified...new boss Kerr

SERBIA

Stunning debut

Petar Jelic made a stunning debut for Rad in the Serbian SuperLiga, scoring five goals in his side's 6-1 thrashing of Belgrade rivals Vozdovac.

"I wasn't even fully fit," claimed the 27-year-old after his first start since arriving from Chinese side Guangdong Sunray Cave.

Although it was a record by one player in a single game since the SuperLiga began in 2006, Jelic was still four goals shy of the Serbian top-flight record set by Partizan Belgrade's Stjepan Bobek in 1946.

SPAIN

Murcia demoted

Murcia, who reached the play-offs for La Liga last season, were demoted to the third tier just three weeks before the new season got underway.

The club, who have an outstanding tax bill of over €10million failed to meet the necessary league requirements, have been replaced in the Segunda Division by Mirandes, who should have been relegated after finishing fourth from bottom last term.

Reprieved...Mirandes fans

Aug 18: Arouca 1 Estoril 1.
Aug 22: Guimaraes 3 Penafiel 0.
Aug 23: Maritimo 2 Academica 1; Pacos de Ferreira 0 Porto 1; Sporting 1 Arouca 0.
Aug 24: Estoril 1 Rio Ave 5; Belenenses 3 Nacional 1; Boavista 0 Benfica 1; Setubal 2 Gil Vicente 0.
Aug 25: Moreirense 0 Braga 0.

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rio Ave	2	2	0	0	7	1	6
Guimaraes	2	2	0	0	6	1	6
Belenenses	2	2	0	0	6	2	6
Benfica	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Porto	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Braga	2	1	1	0	3	0	4
Sporting	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Moreirense	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Setubal	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Maritimo	2	1	0	1	2	3	3
Academica	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Arouca	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Estoril	2	0	1	1	2	6	1
Nacional	2	0	0	2	1	4	0
Pacos Ferreira	2	0	0	2	0	3	0
Gil Vicente	2	0	0	2	1	5	0
Boavista	2	0	0	2	0	4	0
Penafiel	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

34-round season (17x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

SUPER CUP

Aug 10 - Aveiro (Municipal)
Benfica 0
Rio Ave 0
Aet. Benfica 3-2 on pens
Att: 29,895. **Ref:** Pereira Gomes

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Aug 1: St Patrick's 1 Sligo 0; Limerick 4 Shamrock 1; Drogheda 4 UCD 0; Derry 4 Bohemians 0; Bray 1 Athlone 1; Cork 1 Dundalk 2.
Aug 7: Limerick 4 Bray 1.
Aug 8: UCD 0 Bohemians 0; Cork 1 St Patrick's 0; Shamrock 2 Derry 0; Drogheda 1 Dundalk 1.
Aug 9: Sligo 3 Athlone 1.
Aug 15: Athlone 1 Shamrock 1; Bohemians 2 Drogheda 1; Bray 0 Sligo 1; Derry 0 Cork 1; Dundalk 1 Limerick 0; St Patrick's 3 UCD 2.
Aug 18: Cork 1 Bray 1; Drogheda 1 Derry 0; St Patrick's 0 Limerick 1; Sligo 1 Dundalk 1; UCD 1 Athlone 1.
Aug 25: Limerick 0 Derry 4.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dundalk	25	17	6	2	57	20	57
Cork	25	16	5	4	38	19	53
St Patrick's	25	13	7	5	49	28	46
Shamrock	24	13	5	6	33	23	44
Sligo	24	10	6	8	32	20	36
Derry	25	8	9	8	36	27	33
Limerick	25	8	5	12	27	34	29
Bohemians	23	6	10	7	28	28	28
Drogheda	25	8	4	13	30	53	28
UCD	25	4	7	14	24	53	19
Bray	25	4	7	14	19	50	19
Athlone	25	3	5	17	26	44	14

33-round season (11x3); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

ROMANIA

Aug 1: Ceahlaul 1 Targu Mures 4; Viitorul 1 Rapid 2.
Aug 2: Otelul 1 Concordia 2; Steaua 3 CS Universitatea 1.
Aug 3: Petrolul 4 Botosani 1; Astra 5 Brasov 0; Pandurii 0 CFR 0.
Aug 4: Gaz Metan 0 CSM Studentesc 0; Universitatea Cluj 2 Dinamo 3.
Aug 8: CS Universitatea 2 Viitorul 2; Rapid 1 Gaz Metan 1.
Aug 9: Pandurii 0 Ceahlaul 1; Dinamo 1 Targu Mures 1.
Aug 10: Botosani 1 Astra 0; CSM Studentesc 1 Petrolul 5; CFR 0 Steaua 1.
Aug 11: Concordia 0 Universitatea Cluj 2; Brasov 1 Otelul 1.
Aug 15: Gaz Metan 1 CS Universitatea 0; Steaua 6 Pandurii 0.
Aug 16: Astra 2 CSM Studentesc 1; Petrolul 0 Rapid 0.
Aug 17: Targu Mures 2 Concordia 0; Otelul 0 Botosani 1; Ceahlaul 1 Dinamo 1.
Aug 18: Universitatea Cluj 1 Brasov 1; Viitorul 0 CFR 2.
Aug 22: Brasov 2 Targu Mures 1; Concordia 0 Dinamo 0.
Aug 23: Pandurii 1 Viitorul 1; Steaua 0 Ceahlaul 1.
Aug 24: Botosani 1 Universitatea Cluj 0; Rapid 0 Astra 2; CS Universitatea 0 Petrolul 2.
Aug 25: CSM Studentesc 0 Otelul 0; CFR 4 Gaz Metan 1.

ROMANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Petrolul	5	4	1	0	12	2	13
Steaua	5	4	0	1	13	3	12
Astra	5	4	0	1	11	2	12
CFR	5	3	1	1	10	2	10
Dinamo	5	2	3	0	9	4	9
Botosani	5	3	0	2	4	7	9
Targu Mures	5	2	2	1	8	4	8
Gaz Metan	5	2	2	1	6	5	8
Ceahlaul	5	2	1	2	4	9	7
Univ Cluj	5	1	2	2	5	5	5
Rapid	5	1	2	2	4	7	5
Brasov	5	1	2	2	4	9	5
Concordia	5	1	1	3	2	7	4
Viitorul	5	0	3	2	4	7	3
CSM Stud'tesc	5	0	3	2	2	7	3
Pandurii	5	0	3	2	2	9	3
CS Univ'tatea	5	0	2	3	4	9	2
Otelul	5	0	2	3	2	8	2

34-round season (17x2); bottom 6 will be relegated

RUSSIA

Aug 1: Rubin 0 Spartak 4.
Aug 2: Ural 2 Mordovia 3; Arsenal 0 Zenit 4; CSKA 4 Torpedo 1.
Aug 3: Dynamo 7 Rostov 3; Kuban 2 Ufa 0; Lokomotiv 0 Krasnodar 0.
Aug 4: Terek 4 Amkar 0.
Aug 8: Amkar 0 Ufa 1; Kuban 2 Rostov 2.
Aug 9: Mordovia 0 CSKA 1; Zenit 8 Torpedo 1; Terek 1 Rubin 1.
Aug 10: Dynamo 1 Spartak 2; Ural 1 Krasnodar 1; Arsenal 0 Lokomotiv 2.
Aug 12: Torpedo 1 Amkar 1.
Aug 13: Ufa 0 Dynamo 2; Ural 1 Zenit 2; Arsenal 0 Rubin 0; CSKA 1 Terek 0.
Aug 14: Lokomotiv 2 Rostov 1; Krasnodar 4 Spartak 0.
Aug 15: Mordovia 0 Kuban 0.
Aug 16: Ural 0 Torpedo 2; Zenit 1 Ufa 0.
Aug 17: CSKA 0 Spartak 1; Arsenal 1 Dynamo 2; Rubin 1 Lokomotiv 1; Rostov 0 Krasnodar 2.
Aug 18: Terek 1 Mordovia 0; Kuban 1 Amkar 0.
Aug 22: Terek 3 Arsenal 0.
Aug 23: Ufa 1 Spartak 2; Zenit 2 Amkar 0; Rubin 2 CSKA 1.
Aug 24: Dynamo 2 Ural 0; Torpedo 0 Krasnodar 3; Kuban 2 Lokomotiv 1; Rostov 2 Mordovia 1.

RUSSIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zenit	5	5	0	0	17	2	15
Dynamo	5	4	0	1	14	6	12
Spartak	5	4	0	1	9	6	12
Krasnodar	5	3	2	0	10	1	11
Kuban	5	3	2	0	7	3	11
Terek	5	3	1	1	9	2	10
CSKA	5	3	0	2	7	4	9
Lokomotiv	5	2	2	1	6	4	8
Rubin	5	1	3	1	4	7	6
Mordovia	5	1	1	3	4	6	4
Rostov	5	1	1	3	8	14	4
Torpedo	5	1	1	3	5	16	4
Ufa	5	1	0	4	2	7	3
Ural	5	0	1	4	4	10	1
Amkar	5	0	1	4	1	9	1
Arsenal	5	0	1	4	1	11	1

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd & 4th bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

SUPER CUP

July 26 - Krasnodar (Kuban)
CSKA 3 (Wernbloom 56, Tosic 74, Doumbia 80)
Rostov 1 (Milic 37)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 6,400. **Ref:** Nikolaev
Sent off: Gatcan 61min, Kanga 63min (both Rostov)

SCOTLAND

Regular season

Aug 9: Motherwell 1 St Mirren 0; Dundee 1 Kilmarnock 1; Hamilton 0 Inverness 2.
Aug 10: Ross County 1 St Johnstone 2; Aberdeen 0 Dundee United 3.
Aug 13: Kilmarnock 0 Aberdeen 2; St Johnstone 0 Celtic 3; Inverness 0 Dundee 0; St Mirren 0 Hamilton 2; Dundee Utd 1 Motherwell 0; Partick 4 Ross County 0.
Aug 16: Celtic 6 Dundee United 1; Motherwell 0 Inverness 2; Ross County 1 Kilmarnock 2; Dundee 1 Partick 1; Hamilton 1 St Johnstone 0.
Aug 23: Inverness 1 Celtic 0; St Johnstone 1 Aberdeen 0; St Mirren 0 Dundee 1; Partick 1 Hamilton 2; Kilmarnock 2 Motherwell 0; Dundee United 2 Ross County 1.

SCOTLAND – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inverness	4	3	1	0	5	0	10
Hamilton	4	3	0	1	5	3	9
Dundee Utd	4	3	0	1	7	7	9
Kilmarnock	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Celtic	3	2	0	1	9	2	6
Dundee	4	1	3	0	3	2	6
St Johnstone	4	2	0	2	3	5	6
Partick	3	1	1	1	6	3	4
Aberdeen	3	1	0	2	2	4	3
Motherwell	4	1	0	3	1	5	3
St Mirren	3	0	0	3	0	4	0
Ross County	4	0	0	4	3	10	0

33-round regular season (11x3); top 6 will form championship group, bottom 6 will form relegation group (from which the bottom team will go down and the 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs)

SPAIN

Saturday, August 23

Almeria 1 (Soriano 52)
Espanyol 1 (Sergio Garcia 90+13) Att: 12,000

Granada 2 (Rochina 55, Babin 77)
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Ivan Cavaleiro 20)
Att: 14,800

Malaga 1 (Luis Alberto 35)
Athletic Bilbao 0 Att: 24,500

Sevilla 1 (Aleix Vidal 44)
Valencia 1 (Orban 88) Att: 29,352

Sunday, August 24

Barcelona 3 (Messi 42, 63, Munir 46)
Elche 0 Att: 68,105

Celta Vigo 3 (Nolito 20, Orellana 56, Larrivey 70)
Getafe 1 (Sammir 62) Att: 20,416

Eibar 1 (Javi Lara 45)
Real Sociedad 0 Att: 5,173

Levante 0
Villarreal 2 (Uche 56, Cheryshev 85) Att: 19,000

Monday, August 25

Rayo Vallecano 0
Atletico Madrid 0 Att: 11,070

Real Madrid 2 (Benzema 30, Cristiano Ronaldo 90)
Cordoba 0 Att: 70,356

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Celta	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Real Madrid	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Villarreal	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Granada	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Eibar	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Malaga	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Almeria	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Espanyol	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Sevilla	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Valencia	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Atletico	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Rayo	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Deportivo	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Athletic	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Sociedad	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Getafe	1	0	0	1	1	3	0
Cordoba	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Levante	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Elche	1	0	0	1	0	3	0

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading goalscorer

2 Lionel Messi (Barcelona)

SUPER CUP

1st leg

Aug 19
Real Madrid 1 (Rodriguez 81)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Raul Garcia 88)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 75,897. **Ref:** Estrada Fernandez

2nd leg

Aug 22
Atletico Madrid 1 (Mandzukic 2)
Real Madrid 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 54,000. **Ref:** Fernandez Borbalan
Atletico 2-1 on agg
Sent off: Modric (Real Madrid) 90+1min

SWEDEN

Aug 2: Norrkoping 0 Hacken 0; Orebro 1 Halmstad 2; Falkenberg 2 Malmo 5.
Aug 3: Kalmar 1 Brommapojkarna 1; Elfsborg 1 Atvidaberg 0.
Aug 4: Djurgarden 2 Helsingborg 2; Gefle 1 Mjallby 0; Gothenburg 0 AIK 2.
Aug 9: Mjallby 0 Orebro 1; Atvidaberg 3 Kalmar 1.
Aug 10: Helsingborg 0 Norrkoping 0; Halmstad 2 Djurgarden 1; AIK 3 Gefle 1; Malmo 2 Gothenburg 2; Brommapojkarna 2 Falkenberg 3.

ECUADOR

Emelec are champions

Emelec have claimed the first stage of the Serie A championship to qualify for both the Libertadores Cup and Sudamericana Cup next year.

The last few weeks of the season had been disrupted by a players' strike which forced the postponement of two rounds of games before the Ecuadorian Football Federation (FEF) gave money to the clubs to pay overdue wages.

Celebration...Emelec have been impressive so far this year

URUGUAY

Super sub hits four

Racing substitute Agustin Gutierrez scored four times after coming off the substitutes' bench as his side came from 2-0 down to win 4-2 at Danubio on the opening day of the apertura campaign.

The reigning Uruguayan champions took the lead through Matias Castro and Fabricio Formiliano before Gutierrez pulled one back from the penalty spot after 78 minutes. The 21-year-old then equalised in the last minute of normal time and scored two more in injury time.

Aug 11: Hacken 0 Elfsborg 2.
Aug 13: Atvidaberg 1 Gothenburg 1; Brommapojkarna 1 Gefle 2; Malmo 3 Orebro 2; AIK 1 Djurgarden 1.
Aug 14: Mjallby 3 Norrkoping 1; Halmstad 1 Hacken 4; Kalmar 3 Falkenberg 1; Helsingborg 4 Elfsborg 1.
Aug 16: Gefle 0 Malmo 0.
Aug 17: Falkenberg 3 Atvidaberg 0; Orebro 4 AIK 2; Gothenburg 3 Brommapojkarna 0; Elfsborg 2 Kalmar 0.
Aug 18: Djurgarden 4 Mjallby 0; Norrkoping 1 Halmstad 2; Hacken 1 Helsingborg 1.
Aug 22: Mjallby 1 Helsingborg 2.
Aug 23: Malmo 3 Norrkoping 0.
Aug 24: Falkenberg 1 Gothenburg 2; Halmstad 1 Elfsborg 1; AIK 1 Hacken 0.
Aug 25: Atvidaberg 1 Orebro 2; Kalmar 2 Gefle 1; Brommapojkarna 0 Djurgarden 4.

SWEDEN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Malmo	21	14	6	1	43	18	48
AIK	21	12	5	4	42	29	41
Elfsborg	21	11	5	5	33	22	38
Hacken	21	10	5	6	38	25	35
Gothenburg	21	8	10	3	35	24	34
Kalmar	21	9	7	5	29	26	34
Djurgarden	21	7	9	5	36	24	30
Helsingborg	21	6	8	7	26	28	26
Orebro	21	6	7	8	28	32	25
Halmstad	21	6	6	9	26	37	24
Atvidaberg	21	6	6	9	24	35	24
Gefle	21	5	8	8	24	26	23
Falkenberg	21	6	5	10	26	33	23
Norrkoping	21	5	6	10	22	37	21
Mjallby	21	5	3	13	21	35	18
Bromm'karna	21	1	6	14	23	45	9

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

SWITZERLAND

Aug 2: Thun 2 Basle 3; Grasshopper 0 Sion 0.
Aug 3: Zurich 2 Young Boys 1; St Gallen 2 Lucerne 1.
Aug 6: Aarau 1 Vaduz 1.
Aug 9: St Gallen 2 Aarau 2; Basle 4 Zurich 1.
Aug 10: Lucerne 1 Grasshopper 1; Sion 1 Vaduz 0; Young Boys 1 Thun 1.
Aug 13: Vaduz 1 Lucerne 1; Young Boys 4 Grasshopper 0.
Aug 14: Basle 0 St Gallen 2.
Aug 16: Aarau 1 Grasshopper 2; Lucerne 1 Zurich 1.
Aug 17: Sion 2 Basle 3; Thun 3 St Gallen 1; Vaduz 0 Young Boys 2.

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Basle	6	5	0	1	15	8	15
Zurich	6	4	1	1	11	8	13
Thun	6	3	1	2	11	9	10
Young Boys	6	2	3	1	11	6	9
St Gallen	6	2	2	2	9	9	8
Sion	6	2	2	2	5	5	8
Aarau	6	1	3	2	7	8	6
Grasshopper	6	1	2	3	5	10	5
Lucerne	6	0	4	2	5	9	4
Vaduz	6	0	2	4	3	10	2

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated

UKRAINE

Aug 1: Vorskla 1 Shakhtar 2.
Aug 2: Metalist 1 Dynamo 2; Volyn 0 Dnipro 1; Metalurh Zaporizhya 2 Hoverla 1.
Aug 3: Olimpik 1 Zorya 0; Karpaty 0 Metalurh Donetsk 1.
Aug 4: Illichivets 3 Chornomorets 3.
Aug 8: Hoverla 0 Vorskla 0.
Aug 9: Metalurh Donetsk 1 Metalurh Zaporizhya 1; Shakhtar 1 Metalist 0; Dynamo 0 Olimpik 0.
Aug 10: Dnipro 4 Karpaty 0.
Aug 11: Chornomorets 1 Volyn 0; Zorya 1 Illichivets 0.
Aug 15: Olimpik 0 Shakhtar 5; Metalurh Zaporizhya 0 Dnipro 1.
Aug 16: Vorskla 2 Metalurh Donetsk 1; Chornomorets 0 Zorya 0; Metalist 1 Hoverla 0.
Aug 17: Volyn 0 Karpaty 2; Illichivets 1 Dynamo 4.

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shakhtar	4	4	0	0	10	1	12
Dnipro	4	4	0	0	8	0	12
Dynamo	4	3	1	0	7	2	10
Chornomorets	4	2	2	0	8	3	8
Metalist	4	2	0	2	4	4	6
Vorskla	4	1	1	2	3	4	4
Zorya	4	1	1	2	2	3	4
Metalurh D	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Metalurh Z	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Karpaty	4	1	1	2	4	7	4
Olimpik	4	1	1	2	1	9	4
Volyn	4	1	0	3	2	5	3
Hoverla	4	0	2	2	3	5	2
Illichivets	4	0	1	3	5	10	1

26-round season (13x2); bottom team will be relegated

SUPER CUP

July 22 - Lviv (Arena)
Shakhtar 2 (Hladkyi 75, Marlos 90+3)
Dynamo 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 34,347. **Ref:** Mozharovskyi

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Final

1st leg

Aug 6
Nacional (Par) 1 (Santa Cruz 90+3)
San Lorenzo (Arg) 1 (Matos 65)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 36,000. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
Nacional: Don - Coronel (Santa Cruz 71), Caceres, Piris, Mendoza, Melgarejo, Torales, Orue (Lusardi 71), Arguello, Bareiro, Benitez (Dominguez 63).
San Lorenzo: Torrico - Buffarini, Fontanini, Gentiletti, Mas, Villalba (Veron 71), Mercier, Ortigoza (Kalinski 86), Piatti, Romagnoli (Barrientos 77), Matos.

2nd leg

Aug 13
San Lorenzo 1 (Ortigoza pen 36)
Nacional 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 44,000. **Ref:** Ricci (Bra)
San Lorenzo 2-1 on agg
San Lorenzo: Torrico - Buffarini, Cetto, Gentiletti, Mas, Villalba (Kalinski 82), Ortigoza, Mercier, Romagnoli (Kannemann 88), Cauteruccio (Veron 66), Matos.
Nacional: Don - Coronel, Caceres, Piris, Mendoza, Melgarejo (Lusardi 88), Orue (Montenegro 57), Torales, Riveros, Benitez (Santa Cruz 85), Bareiro.

SUDAMERICANA CUP

1st round

1st legs - Aug 19-21; 2nd legs - Aug 26-28
Aguilas Doradas (Col) v Emelec (Ecu) 1-1, 1-2 (agg 2-3); Barcelona (Ecu) v Alianza Lima (Per) 3-0, 0-0 (agg 3-0); Capiata (Par) v Danubio (Uru) 3-1, 2-2 (agg 5-3); General Diaz (Par) v Cobresal (Chl) 2-1, 2-2 (agg 4-3); Huachipato (Chl) v San Jose (Bol) 3-1, 3-2 (agg 6-3); Inti Gas (Per) v Caracas (Ven) 0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2); La Guaira (Ven) v Atletico Nacional (Col) 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2); Millonarios (Col) v Cesar Vallejo (Per) 1-2, 2-2 (agg 3-4); Nacional (Bol) v Libertad (Par) 1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3); Penarol (Uru) v Wilstermann (Bol) 2-0, 4-0 (agg 6-0); Rentistas (Uru) v Cerro Porteno (Par) 0-2, 1-0 (agg 1-2); Trujillanos (Ven) v Independiente (Ecu) 0-1, 1-1 (agg 1-2); Universidad Catolica (Chl) v River Plate (Uru) 0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4); Universidad Catolica (Ecu) v Anzoategui (Ven) 1-1, 1-1 (agg 2-2, Univ Catolica 5-4 on pens); Universitario (Bol) v Iquique (Chl) 2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1); UTC (Per) v Deportivo Cali (Col) 0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3).

Representatives from Argentina and Brazil enter competition in the 2nd round

ARGENTINA

Transitional tournament

Aug 8: Rosario 3 Quilmes 1; Godoy Cruz 3 Banfield 0.
Aug 9: Defensa y Justicia 1 Racing 3.
Aug 10: Independiente 3 Rafaela 0; Boca 0 Newell's 1; Gimnasia LP 1 River Plate 1.
Aug 11: Arsenal 2 Estudiantes 1; Tigre 0 Velez 1.
Aug 13: Lanus 1 Belgrano 0.
Aug 15: Newell's 1 Gimnasia LP 1.
Aug 16: Olimpo 2 Tigre 1; Banfield 2 Defensa y Justicia 3; Velez 2 Arsenal 1; Estudiantes 1 Independiente 0.
Aug 17: Racing 2 San Lorenzo 0; River Plate 2 Rosario 0; Belgrano 0 Boca 1.
Aug 18: Quilmes 2 Godoy Cruz 2; Rafaela 2 Lanus 1.
Aug 22: Arsenal 1 Olimpo 0; Tigre 4 Racing 0.
Aug 23: Gimnasia LP 1 Rosario 2; Newell's 3 Belgrano 3; Independiente 0 Velez 4.
Aug 24: San Lorenzo 0 Banfield 2; Lanus 2 Estudiantes 1; Defensa y Justicia 1 Quilmes 1; Boca 0 Rafaela 3; Godoy Cruz 0 River Plate 4.
Aug 26: Belgrano 0 Gimnasia LP 0; Olimpo 1 Independiente 2; Racing 1 Arsenal 0.
Aug 27: Rosario 0 Godoy 1; Rafaela 2 Newell's 3; River Plate 3 Defensa y Justicia 0; Estudiantes 3 Boca 1.
Aug 28: Banfield 1 Tigre 0; Velez 1 Lanus 0; Quilmes 0 San Lorenzo 3.

ARGENTINA – TRANSITIONAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Velez	4	4	0	0	8	1	12
River Plate	4	3	1	0	10	1	10
Racing	4	3	0	1	6	5	9
Newell's	4	2	2	0	8	6	8
Godoy Cruz	4	2	1	1	6	6	7
Estudiantes	4	2	0	2	6	5	6
Rafaela	4	2	0	2	7	7	6
Rosario	4	2	0	2	5	5	6
Arsenal	4	2	0	2	4	4	6
Lanus	4	2	0	2	4	4	6
Banfield	4	2	0	2	5	6	6
Independiente	4	2	0	2	5	6	6
Def y Justicia	4	1	1	2	5	9	4
Tigre	4	1	0	3	5	4	3
Gimnasia LP	4	0	3	1	3	4	3
Olimpo	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
San Lorenzo	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Boca	4	1	0	3	2	7	3
Belgrano	4	0	2	2	3	5	2
Quilmes	4	0	2	2	4	9	2

19-round tournament (19x1); no relegation at the end of this tournament

BRAZIL

Aug 2: Sao Paulo 1 Criciuma 1; Botafogo 1 Cruzeiro 1; Vitoria 2 Gremio 1.
Aug 3: Chapecoense 1 Flamengo 0; Figueirense 3 Sport 0; Coritiba 0 Corinthians 0; Palmeiras 1 Bahia 1; Internacional 1 Santos 0; Mineiro 3 Paranaense 1; Fluminense 2 Goias 0.
Aug 6: Chapecoense 1 Mineiro 1.
Aug 9: Criciuma 0 Cruzeiro 0; Bahia 1 Goias 0; Fluminense 1 Coritiba 1.
Aug 10: Internacional 2 Gremio 0; Paranaense 2 Botafogo 0; Santos 0 Corinthians 1; Flamengo 1 Sport 0; Chapecoense 0 Figueirense 1; Mineiro 2 Palmeiras 1; Sao Paulo 3 Vitoria 1.
Aug 16: Goias 0 Internacional 1; Corinthians 1 Bahia 1.
Aug 17: Palmeiras 1 Sao Paulo 2; Coritiba 0 Flamengo 1; Cruzeiro 3 Santos 0; Vitoria 0 Chapecoense 0; Gremio 2 Criciuma 0; Botafogo 2 Fluminense 0; Sport 1 Paranaense 1; Figueirense 2 Mineiro 2.
Aug 20: Sport 2 Palmeiras 1; Santos 2 Paranaense 0; Figueirense 1 Botafogo 0; Coritiba 2 Vitoria 0; Bahia 0 Criciuma 0; Flamengo 2 Mineiro 1; Internacional 0 Sao Paulo 1; Chapecoense 1 Fluminense 0.
Aug 21: Corinthians 5 Goias 2; Cruzeiro 1 Gremio 0.
Aug 23: Botafogo 1 Chapecoense 0; Mineiro 1 Internacional 0; Palmeiras 1 Coritiba 0.
Aug 24: Fluminense 4 Sport 0; Sao Paulo 2 Santos 1; Vitoria 0 Figueirense 1; Gremio 2 Corinthians 1; Criciuma 0 Flamengo 2; Paranaense 0 Bahia 0; Goias 0 Cruzeiro 1.

BRAZIL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cruzeiro	17	12	3	2	34	13	39
Sao Paulo	17	9	5	3	28	19	32
Internacional	17	9	4	4	22	13	31
Corinthians	17	8	7	2	23	11	31
Fluminense	17	9	2	6	27	15	29
Mineiro	17	7	5	5	23	19	26
Gremio	17	7	4	6	15	14	25
Sport	17	7	4	6	14	21	25
Paranaense	17	6	6	5	23	22	24
Santos	17	6	5	6	18	13	23
Flamengo	17	6	4	7	14	21	22
Figueirense	17	6	2	9	13	22	20
Goias	17	5	5	7	11	18	20
Botafogo	17	5	4	8	18	18	19
Chapecoense	17	5	4	8	11	16	19
Palmeiras	17	5	2	10	14	23	17
Criciuma	17	4	5	8	9	23	17
Bahia	17	3	7	7	11	16	16
Coritiba	17	3	6	8	14	18	15
Vitoria	17	3	6	8	15	22	15

38-round season (19x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

ECUADOR

ECUADOR – 1ST PHASE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Emelec	22	13	5	4	35	14	44
Independiente	22	11	7	4	36	18	40
LDU Loja	22	11	3	8	25	31	36
Barcelona	22	10	5	7	26	18	35
LDU Quito	22	7	8	7	20	22	29
Univ Catolica	22	8	4	10	26	28	28
El Nacional	22	8	3	11	26	35	27
Dep Quito	22	6	8	8	20	22	26
Olmedo	22	6	8	8	21	24	26
Mushuc Runa	22	7	5	10	19	24	26
Manta	22	6	5	11	21	29	23
Cuenca	22	6	5	11	21	31	23

Season champions will be the team with most points in the combined 1st/2nd phase table; no relegation at the end of the 1st phase

USA

Keeper's new record

Real Salt Lake goalkeeper Nick Rimando set an MLS record with a 113th clean sheet as his side beat DC United 3-0.

ALGERIA

More silverware

League champions MC Alger began the new season by winning the Algerian Super Cup, beating cup winners USM Alger 1-0 with a goal from Sid Ahmed Aouedj.

Unbeatable...keeper Rimando

IVORY COAST

ASEC retain Cup

ASEC Mimosas came from behind to retain the Ivorian Cup, beating league champions Sewe Sport 2-1 in the Final with an extra-time winner from Koffi Davy Boua. Sewe Sport had taken the lead through Roger Assale before Adriel d'Avila Ba Loua equalised for ASEC, who will now enter next year's CAF Confederation Cup.

SENEGAL

First domestic double

AS Pikine became the first team to complete the domestic double since the league turned professional five years ago as they added the Senegalese Cup to the league championship.

They beat Olympique de Ngor 2-1 after extra time in the Final, with goals from Idy Diouf and Sangone Sarr. Pikine will enter the CAF Champions League, while Olympique de Ngor go into CAF Confederation Cup.

CONCACAF

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group 1

Aug 6: Pachuca (Mex) 4 Real Espana (Hnd) 1.
Aug 21: Real Espana 1 Municipal (Gtm) 1.
Aug 27: Municipal 3 Pachuca 7.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pachuca	2	2	0	0	11	4	6
Real Espana	2	0	1	1	2	5	1
Municipal	2	0	1	1	4	8	1

Group 2

Aug 6: Real Esteli (Nic) 1 Saprissa (CR) 1.
Aug 19: Real Esteli 1 Sporting Kansas City (USA) 1.
Aug 26: Saprissa 3 Real Esteli 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saprissa	2	1	1	0	4	1	4
Real Esteli	3	0	2	1	2	5	2
Kansas City	1	0	1	0	1	1	1

Group 3

Aug 5: Montreal Impact (Can) 1 FAS (ESv) 0.
Aug 20: FAS 2 Montreal Impact 3.
Aug 26: New York Red Bulls (USA) 2 FAS 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Montreal	2	2	0	0	4	2	6
New York RB	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
FAS	3	0	0	3	2	6	0

Group 4

Aug 7: Tauro (Pan) 1 Waterhouse (Jam) 2.
Aug 20: DC United (USA) 1 Waterhouse 0.
Aug 28: Waterhouse 4 Tauro 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Waterhouse	3	2	0	1	6	3	6
DC United	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Tauro	2	0	0	2	2	6	0

Group 5

Aug 5: Alpha United (Guy) 0 Olimpia (Hnd) 1.
Aug 19: Alpha United 1 Portland Timbers (USA) 4.
Aug 28: Olimpia 6 Alpha United 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olimpia	2	2	0	0	7	0	6
Portland	1	1	0	0	4	1	3
Alpha United	3	0	0	3	1	11	0

Group 6

Aug 5: Cruz Azul (Mex) 1 Alajuelense (CR) 1.
Aug 19: Chorrillo (Pan) 1 Cruz Azul 0.
Aug 28: Alajuelense 1 Chorrillo 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Alajuelense	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Chorrillo	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Cruz Azul	2	0	1	1	1	2	1

Group 7

Aug 5: Isidro Metapan (ESv) 2 Leon (Mex) 4.
Aug 21: Herediano (CR) 4 Isidro Metapan 0.
Aug 27: Leon 1 Herediano 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Herediano	2	1	1	0	5	1	4
Leon	2	1	1	0	5	3	4
Isidro Metapan	2	0	0	2	2	8	0

Group 8

Aug 7: Comunicaciones (Gtm) 5 Bayamon (PR) 0.
Aug 19: America (Mex) 6 Bayamon 1.
Aug 26: Comunicaciones 1 America 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
America	2	1	1	0	7	2	4
Comunic'nes	2	1	1	0	6	1	4
Bayamon	2	0	0	2	1	11	0

Remaining matchdays:
Sep 16-18, Sep 23-25, Oct 21-23

Group winners qualify for quarter-finals

BARBADOS

BARBADOS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BDF (C)	18	13	2	3	54	21	41
Brittons Hill	18	12	3	3	40	7	39
Pride Gall Hill	18	11	3	4	34	21	36
W'mouth Wales	18	10	2	6	31	21	32
Notre Dame	18	8	3	7	27	27	27
Paradise	18	9	0	9	30	30	27
Pinelands Utd	18	7	2	9	40	37	23
Silver Sands	18	5	1	12	21	45	16
Cosmos (R)	18	2	5	11	12	29	11
Dayrell's Rd (R)	18	1	3	14	11	62	6

BELIZE

Clausura

Final

1st leg - May 10; 2nd leg - May 17
Belmopan Bandits v Police United
3-0, 1-0 (agg 4-0)

BERMUDA

BERMUDA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dandy Town (C)	18	11	4	3	49	25	37
North Village	18	9	5	4	43	23	32
Flanagan's	18	9	2	7	31	30	29
Somerset	18	7	6	5	28	30	27
Devonshire	18	6	8	4	36	34	26
Hamilton	18	8	1	9	30	35	25
PHC	18	6	4	8	33	38	22
Southampton	18	5	3	10	32	35	18
St David's (R)	18	4	5	9	23	44	17
Wolves (R)	18	4	4	10	32	43	16

CAYMAN ISLANDS

CAYMAN ISLANDS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bodden (C)	21	13	7	1	61	19	46
Scholars Intl	21	13	5	3	41	18	44
George Town	21	12	5	4	47	35	41
Sunset	21	7	7	7	32	30	28
Elite	21	6	8	7	51	33	26
Cayman Ath	21	6	5	10	35	41	23
Academy	21	3	5	13	29	63	14
North Side (R)	21	1	4	16	20	77	7

CUBA

CUBA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ciego Avila (C)	18	13	2	3	29	13	41
Villa Clara	18	10	6	2	32	12	36
La Habana	18	10	2	6	36	27	32
Guantanamo	18	8	7	3	19	12	31
Camaguey	18	8	5	5	22	12	29
Sancti Spiritus	18	5	5	8	20	24	20
Cienfuegos	18	5	5	8	8	21	20
Las Tunas	18	5	3	10	14	23	18
Holguin (R)	18	4	3	11	15	31	15
Pinar Rio (R)	18	1	4	13	9	29	7

EL SALVADOR

Clausura

Final

May 25: Isidro Metapan 0 Dragon 0 (aet, Isidro Metapan 6-5 on pens).

FRENCH GUIANA

FRENCH GUIANA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts[1]
Matoury (C)	22	14	5	3	37	12	69
Le Geldar	22	13	4	5	39	15	65
Grand Santi (R)[2]	22	10	7	5	38	23	59
Agouado	22	11	3	8	25	32	58
CSC	22	8	8	6	24	22	54
Macouria	22	7	9	6	32	27	52
Montjoly[3]	22	8	5	9	35	42	49
Cosma	22	5	9	8	21	28	46
Sinnamary[3]	22	6	6	10	27	34	44
Iracoubo	22	7	1	14	21	39	44
St-Georges (R)[4]	22	5	6	11	30	40	43
Javouhey (R)	22	3	7	12	17	32	38

[1]4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw, 1pt for a defeat
[2]Relegated because of irregularities in youth competition
[3]2pts deducted
[4]Relegated after losing rel/prom play-off

GUADELOUPE

GUADELOUPE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts[1]
Moulien (C)	26	17	7	2	49	19	84
Sainte-Rose[2]	26	18	3	5	49	19	82
Siroco	26	16	5	5	41	26	79
L'Etoile	26	12	11	3	46	23	73
La Gauloise	26	14	5	7	47	30	73
Racing	26	12	5	9	41	31	67
Baie-Mahault	26	9	9	8	34	25	62
Juventus	26	8	8	10	25	31	58
Gosier	26	8	6	12	33	34	56
Red Star	26	6	6	14	27	56	50
Vieux-Hab'nts	26	5	7	14	31	52	48
Capesterre (R)	26	4	6	16	36	64	44
AJSS (R)	26	3	8	15	19	48	43
Amical[3] (R)	26	4	6	16	28	48	41

[1]4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw, 1pt for a defeat
[2]1pt deducted
[3]3pts deducted

GUATEMALA

Clausura

Final

1st leg - May 15; 2nd leg - May 18
Municipal v Comunicaciones 0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2)

GUYANA

GUYANA – FINAL

	P	W	D[1]	L	F	A	Pts
Alpha Utd (C)	15	15	0/0	0	62	7	45
GDF	15	10	1/2	2	40	14	34
Western Tigers	15	11	0/1	3	29	14	34
Buxton Utd	15	9	0/2	4	23	15	29
DA Porknockers	15	8	2/0	5	28	17	28
Grove Hi-Tech	15	6	2/2	5	23	24	24
New Amst'dam	15	6	1/0	8	38	25	20
Rosignol Utd	15	4	4/0	7	22	43	20
Silver Shattas	15	5	1/2	7	19	27	19
Riddim Squad	15	5	2/0	8	19	28	19
Winners C'tion	15	5	1/2	7	22	34	19
Milerock	15	5	0/2	8	20	20	17
Santos (R)	15	3	3/2	7	18	29	17
BV/Triumph (R)	15	4	2/1	8	19	34	17
Mahaica D (R)	15	4	0/3	8	13	28	15
Y Achievers (R)	15	1	0/0	14	10	46	3

[1]Drawn games were followed by penalty shoot-outs, the winners of which (left-hand figure) received 2pts, the losers (right-hand figure) 1pt

MARTINIQUE

MARTINIQUE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts[1]
Franciscain (C)	26	16	8	2	57	23	82
Riviere-Pilote	26	17	5	4	55	22	82
Colonial	26	16	8	2	48	16	82
Golden Lion	26	13	9	4	36	24	74
Aiglon	26	12	10	4	37	22	72
Golden Star	26	8	9	9	34	32	59
Essor-Pre'tain	26	8	9	9	35	40	59
Robert	26	7	9	10	24	32	56
Marinoise	26	5	9	12	21	34	50
Samaritaine	26	5	9	12	22	36	50
Belimois	26	5	9	12	25	43	50
Good Luck (R)	26	6	4	16	24	39	48
Riveraine (R)	26	3	11	12	19	40	46
Diamant'se (R)	26	2	9	15	18	52	41

[1]4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw, 1pt for a defeat

MEXICO

Apertura

Regular season

Aug 1: Queretaro 2 Pachuca 0; Tijuana 1 Tigres 1.
Aug 2: Puebla 0 America 4; Cruz Azul 0 Veracruz 0; Monterrey 0 Santos 0; Leon 4 Morelia 0; Atlas 4 Chiapas 2.
Aug 3: Toluca 2 Pumas 1.
Aug 8: Morelia 0 Tijuana 0; Veracruz 2 Monterrey 1.
Aug 9: Cruz Azul 1 Puebla 0; Tigres 0 America 2; Santos 2 Queretaro 3; Pachuca 3 Guadalajara 0; Chiapas 3 Leon 2.
Aug 10: Pumas 0 Atlas 1; Leones Negros 0 Toluca 0.
Aug 14: Leon 2 Pumas 1.
Aug 15: Queretaro 0 Veracruz 0; Tijuana 2 Chiapas 1.
Aug 16: Puebla 1 Tigres 1; America 3 Morelia 2; Monterrey 3 Cruz Azul 1; Atlas 1 Leones Negros 0.
Aug 17: Toluca 3 Pachuca 0; Guadalajara 0 Santos 1.
Aug 22: Morelia 1 Tigres 5; Santos 3 Toluca 0.
Aug 23: Cruz Azul 2 Queretaro 1; Veracruz 0 Guadalajara 0; Monterrey 1 Puebla 0; Pachuca 3 Atlas 1; Chiapas 0 America 0.
Aug 24: Pumas 1 Tijuana 1; Leones Negros 1 Leon 0.

SUDAN

Long wait is over

Al Merreikh ended a 20-year wait to capture their third CECAFA Club Cup, beating APR of the host nation Rwanda 1-0 in the Final at the Amahoro national stadium.

Kenya international striker Allan Wanga scored the only goal of the game. Rwandan side Police beat KCCA of Uganda 4-2 on penalties in the third-place play-off.

JAPAN

Kashiwa triumph again

Kashiwa Reysol added the Suruga Bank Championship to the J.League Cup they won last year by beating the 2013 Sudamericana Cup winners, Lanus of Argentina, 2-1.

Champions...more silverware for Kashiwa Reysol

JORDAN

More of the same

Al Wehdat began the new season where they left off last term, winning the Super Cup with a 2-0 victory over Al Baqa'a – having beaten the same opponents by the same score line in the Cup Final in June. Mahmoud Za'tara and Baha' Faisal were on target for last term's double winners.

MEXICO – APERTURA: REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
America	6	5	1	0	13	4	16
Monterrey	6	4	1	1	9	4	13
Atlas	6	4	1	1	9	5	13
Santos	6	3	2	1	8	4	11
Queretaro	6	3	1	2	8	7	10
Tigres	6	2	3	1	11	7	9
Pachuca	6	3	0	3	7	7	9
Toluca	6	2	2	2	6	6	8
Chiapas	6	2	2	2	9	10	8
Cruz Azul	6	2	2	2	5	6	8
Veracruz	6	1	4	1	2	2	7
Leon	6	2	0	4	11	11	6
Tijuana	6	1	3	2	5	6	6
Guadalajara	5	1	2	2	2	5	5
Puebla	6	1	2	3	2	7	5
Pumas	6	1	1	4	6	8	4
Leones Negros	5	1	1	3	2	5	4
Morelia	6	0	2	4	3	14	2

17-round regular season (17x1); top 8 will enter championship play-offs; no relegation after apertura

NICARAGUA

Clausura

Final

1st leg - May 11; 2nd leg - May 17

Diriangen v Real Esteli 1-2, 0-0 (agg 1-2)

PANAMA

Clausura

Final

May 17: Chorrillo 1 Rio Abajo 0.

ST KITTS & NEVIS

Championship Final

(best of 3 legs)

1st leg - May 29; 2nd leg - June 1

Village Superstars v St Pauls United

1-2, 1-2 (St Pauls 2 legs to 0)

UNITED STATES

Regular season

July 30: DC United 3 Toronto 0; New England 3 Colorado 0; Chicago 0 Vancouver 0; Salt Lake 1 New York Red Bulls 1.
Aug 1: Kansas City 1 Philadelphia 1.
Aug 2: Los Angeles 3 Portland 1; Montreal 0 Toronto 2; New York Red Bulls 2 New England 1; Chicago 1 Columbus 1; Colorado 0 Salt Lake 1; San Jose 1 Seattle 0.
Aug 3: Houston 1 DC United 0; Chivas 0 Dallas 1.
Aug 8: Los Angeles 2 San Jose 2.
Aug 9: Philadelphia 2 Montreal 1; Columbus 2 Toronto 3; Dallas 3 Colorado 1; Salt Lake 3 DC United 0; Portland 2 Chivas 0.
Aug 10: Vancouver 2 Kansas City 0; Chicago 1 New York Red Bulls 0; Seattle 2 Houston 0.
Aug 15: Houston 2 Philadelphia 0.
Aug 16: Salt Lake 2 Seattle 1; Montreal 1 Chicago 0; New England 1 Portland 1; Columbus 4 Los Angeles 1; Kansas City 4 Toronto 1; Chivas 0 Vancouver 0; San Jose 0 Dallas 5.
Aug 17: DC United 4 Colorado 2.
Aug 20: Colorado 3 Los Angeles 4; Seattle 1 San Jose 1.
Aug 22: Dallas 2 Salt Lake 1.
Aug 23: Toronto 2 Chicago 2; New York Red Bulls 4 Montreal 2; New England 1 Chivas 0; Columbus 3 Houston 0; Kansas City 0 DC United 3; Los Angeles 2 Vancouver 0.
Aug 24: Portland 2 Seattle 4; Philadelphia 4 San Jose 2.
Aug 27: Los Angeles 4 DC United 1.

USA – REGULAR: EASTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
DC United	25	13	4	8	40	30	43
Kansas City	25	12	6	7	36	26	42
Columbus	25	8	9	8	35	32	33
Toronto	23	9	6	8	35	36	33
New York RB	24	7	10	7	39	36	31
Philadelphia	25	7	9	9	40	41	30
New England	24	9	3	12	31	36	30
Chicago	24	4	14	6	31	37	26
Houston	24	7	4	13	25	45	25
Montreal	24	4	5	15	25	45	17

34-round regular season (7x3 & 2x2 in own conference, 9x1 in western conference)

USA – REGULAR: WESTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Seattle	24	14	3	7	43	33	45
Los Angeles	24	12	7	5	45	27	43
Dallas	25	12	6	7	45	33	42
Salt Lake	25	11	9	5	39	30	42
Vancouver	24	7	12	5	33	31	33
Portland	25	7	10	8	41	43	31
Colorado	25	8	6	11	37	39	30
San Jose	23	6	7	10	28	32	25
Chivas	24	6	6	12	21	37	24

34-round regular season (8x3 in own conference, 10x1 in eastern conference)

Top 5 in both conferences will enter championship play-offs; no relegation from this league

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Aug 10: TP Mazembe (DRC) 3 Al Hilal (Sud) 1; Zamalek (Egy) 0 AS Vita (DRC) 1.
Aug 22: Al Hilal 2 Zamalek 1.
Aug 24: AS Vita 0 TP Mazembe 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
TP Mazembe (Q)	6	3	2	1	5	2	11
AS Vita (Q)	6	3	2	1	6	4	11
Al Hilal	6	2	1	3	7	9	7
Zamalek	6	1	1	4	4	7	4

Group B

Aug 8: Al Ahly Benghazi (Lby) 0 CS Sfaxien (Tun) 1.
Aug 9: ES Setif (Alg) 2 Esperance (Tun) 2.
Aug 23: CS Sfaxien 1 ES Setif 1.
Aug 24: Esperance 1 Al Ahly Benghazi 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CS Sfaxien (Q)	6	3	2	1	8	5	11
ES Setif (Q)	6	2	4	0	9	6	10
Esperance	6	2	1	3	8	9	7
Al Ahly Ben'zi	6	1	1	4	5	10	4

Top 2 in both groups qualified for semi-finals

Semi-finals draw

AS Vita v CS Sfaxien
ES Setif v TP Mazembe
1st legs - Sep 19-21; 2nd legs - Sep 26-28

CAPE VERDE ISLANDS

Championship Final

1st leg - May 24; 2nd leg - May 31

Mindelense v Academica do Fogo

2-1, 0-0 (agg 2-1)

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

DR CONGO – CHAMP'SHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
TP Mazembe (C)	6	4	1	1	12	2	13
Sanga Balende	6	4	0	2	4	5	12
AS Vita	6	3	0	3	6	6	9
Don Bosco	6	0	1	5	0	9	1

DJIBOUTI

DJIBOUTI – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ali Sabieh (C)	18	16	1	1	53	8	49
Garde Rep	18	13	3	2	56	18	42
Port	18	9	5	4	35	13	32
Dikhil	18	8	5	5	32	20	29
Gendarmerie	18	8	3	7	26	22	27
Tadjourah	18	6	4	8	31	30	22
CDE-Colas	18	6	4	8	23	27	22
Onead/H'zone	18	6	2	10	19	35	20
Bahache/U (R)	18	3	2	13	22	50	11
Arhiba (R)	18	0	1	17	11	85	1

ETHIOPIA

ETHIOPIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
St George (C)	26	22	2	2	55	14	68
Eth'pia Coffee	26	14	6	6	35	23	48
Defence	26	11	9	6	28	24	42
CBE	26	10	9	7	27	25	39
Welayta Dicha	26	8	14	4	23	17	38
Sidama Coffee	26	10	8	8	23	24	38
Arba Minch	26	8	11	7	19	19	35
Awassa	26	8	8	10	24	28	32
Dedebit	26	8	7	11	37	31	31
Muger Cement	26	8	7	11	23	29	31
Dashen Beer	26	6	12	8	11	14	30
EEPCO	26	7	4	15	26	42	25
Harrar Beer (R)	26	4	7	15	16	38	19
Insurance (R)	26	2	8	16	16	35	14

GUINEA

GUINEA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kaloum (C)	22	14	5	3	38	10	47
Horoya	22	13	5	4	32	11	44
Sequence	22	12	4	6	20	15	40
Fello Star	22	8	10	4	22	14	34
Satellite	22	9	6	7	20	15	33
Cl Kamsar	22	8	6	8	12	14	30
Atletico Coleah	22	7	7	8	17	17	28
Soumba	22	8	4	10	18	28	28
Santoba	22	6	7	9	16	24	25
Ashanti GB	22	4	11	7	10	17	23
Bate Naf'ji (R)	22	5	4	13	19	27	19
Espoir Labe (R)	22	1	5	16	9	41	8

LESOTHO

LESOTHO – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bantu (C)	26	17	8	1	51	9	59
Lioli	26	17	3	6	41	17	54
Linare	26	13	10	3	35	17	49
Matlama	26	12	8	6	39	18	44
Defence Force	26	11	11	4	27	17	44
Likhopo	26	12	7	7	36	23	43
LCS	26	11	8	7	25	15	41
LMPS	26	8	6	12	23	30	30
Q Highlanders	26	7	9	10	20	28	30
Mpharane	26	8	4	14	30	58	28
Nyenye	26	5	10	11	20	31	25
Mphatlal'sane	26	4	11	11	23	32	23
Melele (R)	26	2	6	18	15	53	12
Joy (R)	26	1	7	18	15	52	10

LIBERIA

LIBERIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BYC (C)	22	11	7	4	28	14	40
LPRC Oilers	22	11	6	5	34	17	39
MC Breweries	22	10	7	5	26	16	37
Watanga	22	9	7	6	33	26	34
LISCR	22	9	7	6	31	26	34
NPA Anchors	22	10	3	9	26	28	33
Invincible XI	22	10	3	9	20	22	33
Keitrace	22	8	6	8	25	27	30
Jubilee	22	7	8	7	27	23	29
GB Stars (R)	22	6	4	12	24	34	22
Red Lions (R)	22	5	5	12	16	29	20
MB Angels (R)	22	2	5	15	18	46	11

LIBYA

LIBYA – CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ahly T (C)	5	5	0	0	9	3	15
Al Ittihad	5	4	0	1	8	4	12
Al Hilal	5	1	2	2	4	6	5
Al Wahda	5	1	1	3	8	11	4
Al Ahly B	5	1	1	3	4	7	4
Al Madina	5	1	0	4	3	5	3

MAURITANIA

MAURITANIA – CHAMP'SHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nouadhibou (C)	10	7	3	0	17	4	24
Concorde	10	6	1	3	15	14	19
Ksar	10	4	2	4	14	16	14
Tevragh-Zeine	10	4	0	6	13	14	12
Kedia	10	3	1	6	12	16	10
SNIM	10	1	3	6	5	12	6

MAURITIUS

MAURITIUS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cercle J (C)	18	13	4	1	37	12	43
Pamplem'ses	18	11	3	4	34	24	36
P Riviere Noire	18	10	5	3	31	19	35
C'pipe Starlight	18	9	4	5	40	27	31
ASPL 2000	18	8	3	7	31	23	27
Riv du Rempart	18	6	5	7	30	31	23
Entente BR	18	5	3	10	29	31	18
Chamarel	18	4	5	9	32	41	17
Vacoas-P (R)	18	2	6	10	21	37	12
Bolton City (R)	18	2	2	14	15	55	8

RWANDA

RWANDA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
APR (C)	26	20	4	2	46	12	64
Rayon Sports	26	20	2	4	56	22	62
AS Kigali	26	13	9	4	31	18	48
Police	26	14	5	7	53	27	47
Kiyovu Sports	26	11	8	7	33	24	41
Espoir	26	10	9	7	27	23	39
Musanze	26	10	8	8	30	30	38
Mukura	26	8	5	13	29	32	29
Gicumbi	26	6	7	13	20	30	25
Etincelles	26	4	11	11	20	34	23
Amagaju	26	6	5	15	19	35	23
Marines	26	6	5	15	19	43	23
Esperance (R)	26	5	6	15	20	42	21
Muhanga (R)	26	4	6	16	20	51	18

KUWAIT

Qadsia add Super Cup

Al Qadsia added the Kuwait Super Cup to last season's Premier League title with a 3-2 win over Kuwait SC.

SAUDI ARABIA

Shabab are spot on

Al Shabab won the Saudi Super Cup on penalties after drawing 1-1 with reigning league champions Al Nassr ahead of the new Saudi Pro League season.

Super Cup...Al Qadsia (in yellow) and Kuwait SC

VIETNAM

First title in six years

Becamex Binh Duong won the V.League for the first time in six years, beating Dong Tam Long An 3-1 away from home to seal their third league title with a game to spare.

SENEGAL

SENEGAL – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pikine (C)	26	14	7	5	30	12	49
Jaraaf	26	13	9	4	36	22	48
Casa Sport	26	11	8	7	32	18	41
Port Autonome	26	10	11	5	30	21	41
Niarry Tally	26	9	10	7	32	25	37
Ouakam	26	9	8	9	17	18	35
Stade Mbour	26	8	10	8	25	25	34
Linguere	26	8	9	9	23	28	33
Diambars	26	8	8	10	28	26	32
Olympique	26	8	8	10	19	32	32
Toure Kounda	26	5	13	8	16	22	28
Suneor	26	4	15	7	17	21	27
Dakar UC (R)	26	5	9	12	27	38	24
Yeggo (R)	26	2	11	13	13	37	17

SWAZILAND

SWAZILAND – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
R Leopards (C)	22	13	7	2	39	20	46
Mbabane S	22	12	7	3	46	19	43
Manzini W	22	11	6	5	31	20	39
Y Buffaloes	22	10	5	7	28	21	35
Green Mamba	22	9	7	6	26	17	34
Manzini S'ns	22	9	6	7	27	20	33
Malanti Chiefs	22	8	7	7	34	32	31
RSSC Utd	22	8	4	10	21	31	28
Moneni P'tes	22	4	9	9	24	31	21
Manzini SB	22	6	3	13	24	42	21
Umbelebele (R)	22	5	1	16	14	42	16
Midas MC (R)	22	2	8	12	17	36	14

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Aug 19/20; 2nd legs - Aug 26/27

Al Ain (UAE) v Al Ittihad (Sau) 2-0, 3-1 (agg 5-1)
Al Hilal (Sau) v Al Sadd (Qat) 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Pohang Steelers (SKo) v Seoul (SKo)
0-0, 0-0 (aet) (agg 0-0, Seoul 3-0 on pens)
Western Sydney Wanderers (Aus) v
Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn) 1-0, 1-2
(agg 2-2, Western Sydney on away goals)

Semi-finals draw

Al Hilal v Al Ain
Seoul v Western Sydney Wanderers
1st legs - Sep 16/17; 2nd legs - Sep 30/Oct 1

CAMBODIA

CAMBODIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PP Crown (C)	22	17	3	2	57	20	54
Boeung Ket	22	15	2	5	56	27	47
Naga Corp	22	11	7	4	41	18	40
Svay Rieng	22	11	6	5	54	26	39
TriAsia	22	10	4	8	33	22	34
Police Com	22	7	7	8	32	29	28
Build Bright	22	7	6	9	26	44	27
Asia Euro Univ	22	6	8	8	35	48	26
Defense Min	22	5	8	9	28	38	23
Western Univ	22	5	7	10	26	36	22
Kirivong (R)	22	3	4	15	13	49	13
Albirex (R)	22	2	4	16	25	69	10

JAPAN

Aug 2: Gamba 2 Yokohama 0; Tokushima 2 Ventforet 2; Tokyo 4 Shimizu 0; Kashima 5 Sanfrecce 1; Sagan 1 Nagoya 0; Albirex 1 Cerezo 0; Kashiwa 4 Kawasaki 1; Urawa 2 Vissel 2; Vegalta 2 Omiya 2.
Aug 9: Shimizu 1 Tokushima 0; Ventforet 0 Vegalta 0; Vissel 1 Albirex 0; Cerezo 0 Tokyo 0; Nagoya 2 Kashima 3; Yokohama 2 Kashiwa 2; Kawasaki 2 Urawa 1; Omiya 0 Gamba 2.
Aug 11: Sanfrecce 1 Sagan 0.
Aug 16: Urawa 1 Sanfrecce 0; Gamba 0 Nagoya 1; Kashima 1 Ventforet 0; Vegalta 3 Shimizu 2; Kashiwa 2 Vissel 0; Kawasaki 5 Cerezo 4; Albirex 2 Omiya 1; Tokushima 0 Yokohama 3; Sagan 0 Tokyo 2.
Aug 23: Shimizu 1 Kashima 3; Tokyo 4 Urawa 4; Ventforet 3 Gamba 3; Omiya 1 Sagan 3; Yokohama 2 Kawasaki 0; Albirex 1 Tokushima 2; Nagoya 1 Kashiwa 1; Vissel 2 Vegalta 1; Sanfrecce 0 Cerezo 0.

JAPAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Urawa	21	12	5	4	31	18	41
Sagan	21	13	1	7	29	17	40
Kashima	21	12	3	6	41	24	39
Kawasaki	21	12	3	6	38	27	39
Tokyo	21	9	6	6	29	19	33
Vissel	21	8	8	5	33	29	32
Kashiwa	21	8	8	5	27	26	32
Gamba	21	9	4	8	32	24	31
Sanfrecce	21	8	7	6	28	27	31
Yokohama	21	8	6	7	26	19	30
Albirex	21	7	7	7	18	19	28
Vegalta	21	6	7	8	20	32	25
Shimizu	21	7	3	11	25	34	24
Nagoya	21	6	5	10	27	34	23
Ventforet	21	4	9	8	17	23	21
Cerezo	21	4	8	9	23	25	20
Omiya	21	3	7	11	27	41	16
Tokushima	21	3	3	15	11	44	12

34-round season (17x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

LAOS

LAOS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
HA Attapeu (C)	18	13	3	2	63	29	42
Lao Toyota	18	12	2	4	56	19	38
Champasak	18	11	3	4	43	19	36
Police	18	10	3	5	45	24	33
Lane Xang	18	10	3	5	28	23	33
Ezra	18	8	3	7	30	31	27
Army	18	6	5	7	26	26	23
Yotha	18	3	1	14	28	72	10
Savannakhet	18	2	2	14	19	48	8
Eastern Star	18	1	3	14	18	65	6

MACAU

MACAU – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benfica (C)	16	13	2	1	63	5	41
Sporting	16	12	2	2	41	11	38
Monte Carlo	16	11	3	2	56	19	36
Windsor Arch	16	9	4	3	47	17	31
Policia	16	5	4	7	24	24	19
Chao Pak Kei	16	4	5	7	26	30	17
Lai Chi	16	4	1	11	26	52	13
Development	16	3	0	13	10	63	9
Kei Lun	16	0	1	15	10	82	1

VIETNAM

VIETNAM – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Binh Duong (C)	22	15	4	3	53	23	49
Hanoi T&T	22	14	5	3	66	40	47
Thanh Hoa	22	12	4	6	32	34	40
Da Nang	22	11	6	5	43	33	39
Song Lam NA	22	10	6	6	38	26	36
Quang Ninh	22	9	2	11	43	44	29
Dong Nai	22	7	4	11	39	40	25
Quang Nam	22	7	4	11	34	52	25
HA Gia Lai	22	5	8	9	41	48	23
Hai Phong	22	5	6	11	26	37	21
Long An	22	5	6	11	29	45	21
An Giang (R)[1]	22	3	3	16	22	44	12
Ninh Binh[2] (R)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

[1]Relegated after losing rel/prom play-off
[2]Withdrew after 8 rounds; results expunged

YEMEN

YEMEN – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Saqr (C)	26	20	5	1	50	14	65
Al Ahli Sanaa	26	17	4	5	45	25	55
Al Tilal	26	12	7	7	41	24	43
Al Oruba	26	10	10	6	22	15	40
Al Ittihad	26	10	10	6	31	30	40
Al Yarmuk	26	10	8	8	38	28	38
Shabab Jeel	26	9	10	7	31	27	37
Al Sha'ab HM	26	9	7	10	36	33	34
Al Hilal	26	8	10	8	28	35	34
Al Sha'ab Ibb	26	9	6	11	29	30	33
Al Sha'ab S (R)	26	5	8	13	15	35	23
Al Rasheed (R)	26	4	8	14	16	36	20
Al Ahli Taizz (R)	26	3	8	15	18	36	17
May 22 (R)	26	3	5	18	22	54	14

OCEANIA

SOLOMON ISLANDS

SOLOMON ISLANDS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
S Warriors (C)	15	11	4	0	55	15	37
Kossa[1]	15	8	2	5	39	26	24
Western Utd	15	7	3	5	30	28	24
X-Beam[1]	15	7	4	4	43	27	23
Malaita Kingz	15	6	5	4	25	20	23
Koloale	15	5	5	5	25	26	20
Hana	15	5	1	9	24	45	16
Kakamora	15	2	2	11	12	42	8
Marist Fire[2]	8	0	0	8	0	24	0

No relegation at the end of this season
[1]2pts deducted [2]Expelled for failing to pay registration fee; results expunged and all their games in first half of season awarded as 3-0 wins to opponents

TAHITI

TAHITI – CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts[1]
Pirae[2] (C)	10	8	1	1	33	18	37
Tefana	10	6	3	1	28	16	31
Venus	10	4	2	4	21	19	24
Dragon	10	4	0	6	19	23	22
Manu Ura	10	2	3	5	14	19	19
Roniu	10	1	1	8	16	36	14

No relegation at the end of this season
[1]4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw, 1pt for a defeat
[2]Received 2 bonus points for topping the regular-season table

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions (R) = relegated

September 2014 Vol 54 No 13

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Thanks this issue to
Debbie Millett, Peter Neish, David Preston, Dave Rallis

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Periodicals paid at Rahway, NJ Postmaster: send address changes to *World Soccer*, c/o MAIL America, 365 Blair Road, Avenel NJ 07001, USA. USPS004075

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World Soccer's GREAT TEAMS

Croatia 1998

Seven years after the break-up of Yugoslavia, the new nation took third place at the World Cup

Triumphant...Croatia celebrate beating Holland to take third place, at Parc des Princes in Paris, on their World Cup debut

Croatia's 1998 World Cup squad contained many players who had come through the youth ranks of the old Yugoslavia, including three – Robert Jarni, Robert Prosinecki and Davor Suker – who were in the Yugoslav squad at the 1990 finals in Italy.

Michael Hodges wrote in the August 1998 edition of *World Soccer*: "The strength to succeed came from the very real feeling that the players represented a nation and that in some way they were atoning for Croatian sufferings during the civil war."

Croatia began with a 3-1 win over fellow tournament debutants Jamaica. A well-organised Japan were then beaten by a single goal and Croatia qualified for the knock-out stage despite losing the last group game to Argentina.

Romania were beaten in the second round and then it was Germany, who had defeated Croatia two years earlier at Euro 96, in the quarter-finals.

With a determination to right the wrong of two years previous, Croatia weathered an early onslaught and then came to life after Germany's Christian Worns was sent off. Playing fluent counter-attacking football, they won 3-0 with goals from Jarni, Goran Vlaovic and Suker.

The semi-final against hosts France, however, was a game too far. Although Croatia led through a goal from Suker, Lilian Thuram equalised almost immediately and then scored the winner – his only two goals in 142 internationals.

Keir Radnedge reflected Croatia "had perhaps paid a penalty in fatigue for the emotional stress of their quarter-final victory".

Although France had deserved to win, Croatia had given them the fright of their lives and went on to claim third place with a 2-1 win against Holland. WS

THE COACH AND HIS TEAM

Miroslav Blazevic
Became coach of Croatia in 1994 and led them to the quarter-finals at Euro 96 and third place at the 1998 World Cup.

When his six-year tenure ended in 2000 he was appointed national coach of Iran and later had a spell in charge of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Back in club football again, he was appointed coach of Croatian top-flight side Zadar in September 2014.

Tactics
Blazevic began the 1998 World Cup with a 3-5-2 formation that would morph into a 3-6-1 or 5-4-1 with Suker playing as the loan striker and Stanic in an advanced midfield role.

Goran Vlaovic came into the team at the expense of Prosinecki to play in a front two alongside Suker in the quarter-final and semi-final. Prosinecki then returned for the third-place play-off in a more conventional 4-4-2.

THE STARTING XI

Drazen Ladic
Goalkeeper
Played in Croatia's first international. Later coached the under-21s but stood down in 2011.

Dario Simic
Right wing-back
Versatile defender who won 100 caps and played for both Milan clubs in a nine-year spell.

Robert Jarni
Left wing-back
One of only two players to play in the World Cup for Yugoslavia (1990) and Croatia (1998).

Igor Stimac
Centre-back
Formed a formidable partnership alongside Bilic and later succeeded him as Croatia coach.

Slaven Bilic
Centre-back
Cultured defender who coached Croatia to the Euro quarter-finals in 2008.

Zvonimir Soldo
Centre-back
Could also operate as a defensive midfielder. Played at Euro 96 and the World Cups of 1998 and 2002.

Zvonimir Boban
Midfield
Captain of the 1998 team and one of Croatia's most talented players. Retired in 2002 and now works in TV.

Robert Prosinecki
Midfield
The only player to score for two different countries at the World Cup: Yugoslavia (1990) and Croatia (1998).

Mario Stanic
Midfield
Scored Croatia's first-ever goal at a World Cup, in their opening group win against Jamaica.

Aljosa Asanovic
Midfield
Scored Croatia's first goal at international level. Was assistant coach to Bilic until 2011.

Davor Suker
Forward
Won the Golden Boot in 1998 with six goals. Is president of the Croatian Football Federation.

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